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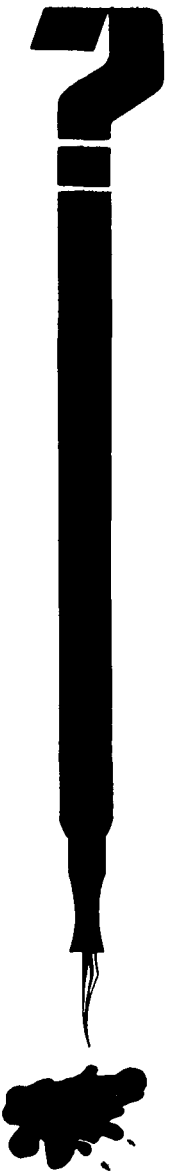

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# The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

VOLUME XXXIX NUMBER 2 SUMMER 1986

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## TO OUR READERS

A new book by an Advisory Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW has recently been published. In accordance with our policy, the book will not be reviewed in these pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

**HAYDEN CARRUTH:** *The Selected Poetry of Hayden Carruth.* Macmillan. $19.95; $10.95.

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# Reports:

# Scenes from Nicaragua

WE SAT IN A HOT, DARKENED ROOM. A young officer was reciting the history of the Sandinista revolution from a document in front of him. His eyes were clear, his face young. He spoke with nervous authority. On the bench across from us sat four solemn-faced soldiers: two of them young, sporting bright Sears & Roebuck-style T-shirts, the other two gristled and wrinkled in fatigues and beret with their firearms across their knees. The older ones were called Isidoro and Francisco. Francisco Moreno had participated in the first battle of the Sandinista revolution here at Pancosan. After our conversation, we went to see the museum commemorating the event—a wooden shack on the site of the battle in which eighteen Sandinistas were attacked by two hundred Somocistas and the house surrounded. The Sandinistas lost several of their men and the rest escaped to a nearby mountain. It was akin in my mind to visiting Lexington and Concord guided by Paul Revere. Inside the museum were pictures of the original eighteen, one of whom bore the sobriquet of "The Tiger from the Mountains." They told us a bit about the fighting which particularly interested me because of my own background in the Marine Corps as a rifle platoon leader during World War II. Tactics do not seem to have changed much in the last forty years. When asked who the Contras were, they replied that the most tragic thing is that most of them are campesinos, too ignorant to understand the issues at stake but led to fight against their brothers by cynical former members of Somoza's guard. As I looked into the faces of these soldiers and listened to them recount tales of the raggedy guerilla warfare going on nearby, I did not feel that the United States was threatened.

The foreman at La Fundadora, a coffee plantation, could not wait to show us the way they process the coffee and to boast of the thousands of sacks harvested this year. With some glee he pointed out Somoza's house where he stayed when he was still the owner of this plantation. It wasn't very grand, I admit; yet our friend said, with some passion, that in the old days none of the campesinos were allowed to go up the street toward the house.

An evening conversation, two or three days later, gave an insight into the urban areas. We met with Christian Base Community leaders in *Barrio Septembre 14* in Managua. Two middle-aged men, Julio

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and Carlos, described how they built the Christian communities—one of them was the oldest in the country. They said the communities could not exist in parishes where the priest opposed them, but that essentially they were a lay movement. Their leaders were trained to instruct couples for marriage, to give catechism and to perform other Christian services, and were also involved in the neighborhood organizations of their districts. I asked about the separation of Church and State. Carlos said, "I don't quite understand. We act as Christian individuals in the neighborhood organization. And it is so different when you have a revolutionary government. You can have access to authorities and suggest change. You do not have to be separate in order to be critical. You do not have to criticize from a distance." We sat on Julio's porch; the street outside was dirt. He and a large family live inside and I could see them peering out; nice looking kids, full of smiles. Julio continued to describe the Base Communities. "They bring the words of Jesus to us to show us how to act about our own problems in our community." Carlos joined in, "We are working to get a school now."

I spent an hour and a half with the Foreign Minister, Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, one morning. The Foreign Ministry is a handsome, modest one-story building built around a central garden. On the walls of the Foreign Minister's office were two striking Nicaraguan paintings: one an abstract canvas of cogged wheels, the other an impressionistic painting of a group of campesinos. Miguel D'Escoto is a Maryknoll father, soft-spoken, earnest, ingenuous. He has a nice open face, good eyes. He pulled up his chair to talk to me in a more intimate fashion. I'd met him before but never had a chance to have a long discussion with him, and after a few minutes I felt as if I had known him for many years. We had much in common as fellow clergy and as people concerned with social justice issues. He spoke quite easily of his faith and of his politics. He spoke of hope. "Hope? Yes. The best thing to happen in a long time," he began—his eyes lit up and he tapped my knee as if to emphasize the urgency of this development—"is that the Heads of State of every Central American country will meet in May. We want to establish a Central American Parliament, regularize the meetings of Foreign Ministers and Vice Presidents, and have occasional summit meetings of Heads of State. And we really *want* to meet. The new President of Costa Rica suggested it. It is becoming clear to us all, whatever our politics, that this is a North/South struggle, not an East/West struggle, and that we must stick together."

We spoke about many things, but chiefly about the difficulty of communication—the distortions, the untruths, the myths with which the citizens of the United States are showered. As we finished our conversation, I suggested we pray together. Kneeling, he asked for my blessing and gave me his.

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The night before we left, my son George who lives in Managua with his wife, Alice, gave us a party. Most of the people present were artists, priests, nuns and journalists, and I picked up a good deal from conversations with them. One of the most shocking things I heard was from a Roman Catholic sister, an American, who had been in Nicaragua for many years. A week before Easter she had been down at the coast and had been told of Contra atrocities. She told of a convent they set fire to in the middle of the night two weeks before. She told of a delegate of the Word (a Catholic lay worker) who was murdered on Good Friday and horribly mutilated, having been castrated and had his eyes taken out. She said the Contras had no use for the Church, that none of them went to Mass the Sunday she was there. She spoke of her affection for the people and particularly for the community of Miskito women whose convent had been burned down, one of whom, with four small children, had barely escaped with her life that night. For the man who was assassinated on Good Friday, they held a Mass of the Resurrection on Easter. It was filled with joy at his witness and love for his people. When his body was found, the cross he had always worn had disappeared. The sister said that was like Jesus; on Easter Day he, too, had lost his cross.

PAUL MOORE, JR.

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# Letter from India

## Summerdusts and a Scent of Mangoes

> When the sun has set, Yajnavalkya, and the moon has set and the fire has gone out and speech has stopped, what serves as a light for a man?
>
> The self, indeed, is his light, for with the self as light he sits, goes out, works and returns.
>
> —from the *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, IV.iii.6

COMING BACK HOME TO INDIA after a six-week-long visit to Japan, I am suddenly struck by the time lag of this tethered country of mine. A sort of dead zone opens in front of me; gone is the synchronous hum of officegoers I experienced the week before in the Tokyo subways, the innocuous oscillations of the weekend crowds at Shinjuku, the purifying grace of cemeteries along the low hill slopes. The nostalgia for the Indian countryside, for the densely tangled green woodland and the blistered ranges of hills stretching away from the water-logged paddies along the coast, now somehow ceases to excite the imagination; a warm moist wind of centuries founders in the weary eyes of the people of this tropical land.

Yes, weary but alive when you watch the five-year-old half–naked child sifting a few grains of rice spilt in the exit drain of the railway restaurant, grinning into the fetid darkness before your eyes. The fuzzy meaningless twilight envelops you as you watch the leper-woman stretch out her mangled palm toward you for a coin, her inner laughter flying in the erratic breeze. Strange that no one feels restless or lost, seeing such things. I should like to believe that an innocence rules us, a reckless innocence, very real and deep, difficult for the occasional visitor to understand. Yet it will not be an untruth to say that many who come from the West do understand and share this seductive power, which enables the people to survive with friendliness and heroism.

It is the beginning of summer here in Orissa, the coastal region on the east where I have spent almost all my life except for short and infrequent visits outside. Mainly agricultural for as long as one can remember, Orissa is now being gradually taken through the process of industrialization. Orissa, on the Bay of Bengal, with lush jungles and grizzled mountains, at times mellow, at times fearful—endowing it with primitive power. Villages large and small scattered

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along the many rivers crisscrossing this polytheistic land; rivers which run madly in spate when the savage clouds of the yearly southwest monsoon ruffle up the land, after the long dry summer months, and flood waters engulf the ochre earth in misery. But strangely, the people spring back to their normal existence soon after the calamities; and life goes on the same way as before. One is tempted to ask: is this courage merely a momentary valor that makes them forget their continual hardship, or is it an unfeelingness, a torpor that comes from an acceptance of the law of *karma*—bringing forth a quiet endurance in them, deep and hard and unflinching as the rock which scars this ancient land?

But it is difficult to get any answers. Answers are of no consequence to people here, in a land where the same world goes on and on endlessly, where the rain and the sun seem to do nothing new to the earth, where rituals of old provide the flux of life. But I ask myself questions because I have little faith in me, unlike the millions who believe in their hundreds of gods: a goddess to pray for the boon of a son, a god to beg for a handsome husband, a goddess for riches and so on. These people, among whom I live, they are so unconcerned. A kind of struggle floats in the air and laps the hearts of men like the waves of the sea: the struggle just to live, against drought and floods, against storms and disease and hunger. Nothing else. They are people who wear no masks in their day-to-day lives. They are simply people who believe that things happen as the consequence of things that have happened before, and that nothing can change the entire sequence of things. And so they can suffer one day after another, for a whole lifetime, while the sun and the rain and the earth build their tales, and they rehearse their stories to themselves, discovering those truths that they wish to know.

Now summer is here for four long months, from March through June. It is a hot, humid season when temperatures average 42 degrees Celsius in the shade. The din and bustle of the mornings slowly die down to a drowsy leisure in the afternoons. And mostly the nights are hot and sweaty, too uncomfortable for people to sleep in their small, stuffy houses. And so perhaps the inhabitants of Orissa spend the dark hours in the market-squares, stubbornly watching folk plays based on ancient epics like the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*. By the time the late evening shows at the few cinema halls are giving over, the embellishments and the electric lighting are affixed to the makeshift wooden stages erected at the crossroads of towns and villages. The hot summer night is a challenge, the air impatient for laughter and amusement. Soon the approaches are jammed with men, women and children. All regular traffic shuffles to a halt. Loudspeakers blare. A haunting strain from a *shehnai* heralds a poignant moment from the *Ramayana*, the scene in which Prince Rama is banished from his own kingdom for fourteen long years at the insistence of his cruel stepmother. The packed crowd

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holds its breath, the women looking to someone other than themselves, nobler than themselves, to redeem them as they view Sita, Rama's wife, meekly following her husband and holding aloft her pure face that suggests a luminous dawn. Particles of time float in the air, separate, then come together. Perhaps this is what breaks the silence of every human being on this festive night: time swelling within the womb of night, silhouetting the unknown territory of the past against the present. Slowly one realizes that one is living at one particular instant in three layers of time—the mythic, the historical and the present. And what one sees in the present is only what has stirred the air of the place for countless generations. So act follows act, as actors turn into gods for a night, eager to bestow faith on those spectators who seem always to need it. And when the eastern horizon shows the wings of light from the rising of the sun, both players and audience leave, to rest and catch up on the sleep they have lost.

Almost anyone from abroad who visits Orissa goes through a whole series of emotions—from sheer shock and disbelief to amazement, and finally to something that seems to enter the being silently, and gives the heart a resignation against the better judgments of the mind—making the visitor aware of this will of the people to *live*. A time-inherited people, living amidst temples and shrines, with their fairs and festivals, feasts and fasting; and growing through disastrous cyclones and famines into the deep-rooted tradition of their ancestors. Look into the faces trudging along the dusty, pitted roads—perhaps faces of bodies that have been going without proper food for two days—you will notice that their eyes are quick and warm and alive, like oil lamps burning, throwing around them their tiny worlds of beaten gold! There, in the burning heat of noon, the farmer stands, frail and naked, looking down at the little patch of his land; but it is the light in his eyes that you notice, burning pure as water; from her numb village hut the new bride takes slow close steps to the river, her warm alert breath filling the empty pitcher cradled in her arm; and the men speak a language of summerdusts, its light scattered by the scents of mangoes, like an aura of hyacinths rising from numerous village pools. In dark quiet evenings they remember the dead men who never leave them lonely; the fires of evening with their illusion of light.

For essentially India is a land obsessed with light. Particularly Orissa, with its bias for sun-worship that has bound the people for hundreds of years. Far away from the recognized tourist centers of the country, perhaps the inaccessible, comfortless countryside of Orissa deters the visitor. Along the coast, the sea is a meditating blue as a brilliant sun urges it from nowhere to break its surface in myriad glints of silver. The wind is a dogged, cool caress even in the heat of day. The coastline is flat and the bold light leaps from one fiery crown to another of the rows of coconut palms greening

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the land as far as the eye can see. Pariah kites slowly circle above as stray white summer clouds drift on high in the skies, away from the pulsating urgency of hunger on the ground, and in the fishermen's shoddy shacks along the sandy beaches, where naked bodies are prisoners of themselves. Deeper inland the banyans take root like giants, extending their mysterious limbs into the air, standing guard like sentinels from some bygone era; while on the earth the stubborn grass frets and sways and the mimosas droop into sleep at the touch of unknown presences. And on a deserted stretch of sand stands the monumental temple to the Sun God, shaped as a gigantic chariot. The twenty–four magnificently carved stone wheels, the seven proud horses pulling this massive edifice, are those symbols of time our ancestors forged in fear and love to overcome their world. What does it promise? A journey into the unknown, an end, or an uncontrolled amazement? All I know is that I live in a timeless country as I wait for whatever it is that would tell me where I have come from and what I am going to be. And that is the pattern of life that stays in my memory.

Yet polytheistic though India is, all religious belief in Orissa strangely points to one god—to the temple of Jagannath at Puri, the scene of the famed chariot festival, when the grotesque limbless deity of Jagannath is ceremoniously taken out every year for his symbolic tour of the universe, to study the fate of mankind. To my mind, Jagannath remains the most primitive of gods, having his origins in the rituals of savage tribes of the dense Orissa forests. For here were the ambiguous essences symbolised and made into ritual objects. The totem soon became the escape of the dark will into freedom. The shape was necessary for worship, for contemplation; a shape as primitive today as it was three thousand yeas ago: a stark log of wood with huge circles for eyes, minus hands or feet; a shape that moves you as you stare at it, moving darkly and circling, and drawing you with the ropes of your breath into a country of your own making where you stand, transfixed, saying to yourself: "Do what you want, I am ready. Join my life."

But I was speaking of summer. This year it hasn't been as warm as in previous years. Almost every week, around late afternoon, a wild wind blows in suddenly from the west, along with threatening swells of dark rain clouds. The sun dies out, thunder rumbles ominously overhead, savage gusts of wind throw objects here and there. Inside the house, I run to shut the doors and windows. Dust seems to be everywhere; it enters the nostrils and stings the eyes. Cyclists on the roads are thrown off balance; aging trees lie uprooted disrupting traffic. And then the rain of a summer storm seems to pour all over the earth, lashing everything in its path. The air smells of ozone, of fish and seaweed. Then the rain stops as suddenly as it had begun. It has become cool, the temperature dropping to the twenties. Outside are little pools on the ground to cool the bare feet of children dashing after the joy of uprooted things. I look out the

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window and see two crows, wet and shivering, on a tall branch of the deodar in the yard. A magpie robin calls sweetly from a nearby bush. The mango tree looks darker with raindrops on the leaves; the green fruit hang lower with the extra weight of water on them. The wet earth touches me, leaves of my heart dripping. Above me, the sky trembles with a new measure of space. I glimpse something there, like my mind, afloat—the truth of old legends and epics, slipping between reality and dream.

Cuttack, where I was born and grew up by the bank of a river beside that dark-bellied temple, which stands today, dark and drowsy, as though asleep. Cuttack, the dusty, malarial town lying in a bowl of humble valley between two rivers—where I grew up, spent my boyhood and youth. Cuttack, that brings me face to face with my memories. Cuttack, where the tired footprints of my long dead grandfather still remind me of his hunger and anguish. Once, years ago, his footprints would have left their agitated trail in the unmade paths of this land. As he ran on, suffering uncontrollably from hunger, away from the frayed fabric that the famine had made of his life—he was picked up, shrunk to bone, by some white missionaries, and entered a time of new religion and unease. Cuttack, my poem of long memory, where tuberculosis stilled the pearly body of the thirteen-year-old girl before her breasts had bloomed to purity. Where hundreds of lepers still shuffle along the dirty roads, begging from door to door, and believing in their heart of hearts that they *are* suffering for the sins they had committed in their previous lives. Where the slender but starving whore brazenly searches for customers on hot summer nights. Cuttack, with its ruined, battle-scarred fort, surrounded by a moat now clogged with weeds and slime. And where the old banyan tree still stands by the river, its trunk frayed, its branches gasping for air—the tree from whose high boughs criminals were hanged in the old days . . .

Who would seriously consider now writing ornamental, romantic stuff akin to the ancient Sanskrit? Yet, perhaps, some continue to write in that vein, urged on by the aural poetry of the epics, that lives on via the performing arts. I remember the following lines by an Orissan poet in praise of poetry:

Poetry is a sensitive woman
whose father is the poet
But whose midwife lays her bare.

The true measure of her worth
is recognized
Only when she is enjoyed
by an exalted man of learning.
An idiot is merely
a malicious stepbrother to her.

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Without relevance to our society today, this poetry only empties itself. Hunger and sexuality remain our basic issues. It remains to *us* to talk of such things.

For nothing is clean here but grief.

With the sense of destiny one encounters at every step, one appears to hold one's birth in one's hand. It is the dead in India who debase the living; and the people continue to think that they have the right to do so—an example of an innocence which carries them motionless forever through vague tomorrows.

Out there in the street, under a warm sticky sun, a tourist from a far-off land walks about aimless, seeking repose in the white haze of unyielding stone; the seventeenth beggar-woman of the morning is becoming another face on an empty coastline that will continue to haunt him (unlike the rich bronze he is going to carry back as a priceless souvenir for his living room) as a momentary stab of conscience. And conscience, too, is the feel of the melted tar of the street against the soles of his Florsheims, the smell of cigarettes and beer, the perfect lines of kohl on Lakshmi's taunting eyelids, and babies' cries sprinkled in the sun. And as the tourist walks to his car idling in the street, he thinks it's too much bother, trying to be *us* as well as himself—perhaps holding his breath in mild wonder as he sees through the ritual farce we play to the ghosts of our ancestors we will surely become.

His car meanders through the chaotic traffic and suddenly comes to a halt at the common enough sight of a bull chasing a cow. Ahead the street is almost clear, pedestrians having given way for the two creatures to copulate. Time's stubborn voice persists. In the people's eyes, this is still in part a sacred sight. A group of young schoolgirls in navy blue pinafores give shy glances as they whisper self–consciously to one another. It is a scene the visitor finds hard to take in. But this is the rural India I live in, another of the endless *mantras* of survival. I remember a passage from the *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*:

> In the embrace of his beloved a man
> forgets the whole world,
> everything within and without;
> in the very same way, he who embraces the Self
> knows neither within nor without.

To what end, one wonders. Toward what grace which eludes me as much as it does the self-seeking tourist? One is awed when one observes the sinuous men and women, gods and goddesses, clinging erotically to one another on temple walls; exquisite and sensuous figures in granite, they end there. For when one enters the inner sanctum, the walls are bare except for the deity in the center. Strange how a sense of a perfect whole is experienced through a

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synthesis of opposites: through thought and action, cause and effect, through the man-woman principle of *ardhanārishwar*: half man, half woman.

Now as I come to the end of this letter, I realize that I have merely been walking back and forth along these paths, losing myself like light in river and sky, asking for pain like my fellow beings. Perhaps it is a poem I crave for, an illusive alphabet that betrays with words upon a page. The air above the street beyond starts to tremble in the day's heat, and the sun is going up over the rooftops and coconut palms. And the crows are flying in and out, picking up scraps of food, flying into more crows. A black, humped bull ambles away from the middle of the road where he has spent the late hours of the night. Another morning, I tell myself, waking to dream: of the clack of wooden clogs on worn-out flagstones, of the tinkle of silver anklets as dancing girls walk in the courtyards of temples and palaces, of the chants of shaven priests in their flowing ochre robes. Maybe a little of all this is still afloat in the air, as I watch the women going to the river for their morning bath and discover in their eyes the promise of mysteries too ancient for me to understand.

The day passes by. Perhaps I am too awake. Or perhaps all that I have written exists only in my mind. Or am I merely playing in the light, reaching for stars, feeling layer on layer on layer of time? It is difficult to take refuge in a faith my people understand. It becomes difficult to replace myself. I don't know what to believe in: but maybe in what we face in one another, what we do to one another—and even that gives off an air of sadness . . . like the scent of mangoes in the sluggish morning breeze. Maybe a faith comes into being in the self, moment by moment, within a stone, a leaf, a face, an empire or a legend, within an instant that extends itself over the hour; within anything that makes you forget its power, sweeping you on to your destiny.

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

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WILLIAM HALLBERG

# The Rub of the Green

At first Golf was only a green shade protecting me from the gathering white heat of my mother's death.

Stan, my dad, wouldn't admit she was going to die and refused to make any plans for her cremation. Instead he spent the last weeks of her hospital stay rearranging all our furniture in ways that would please her when she came home. Of course, she never made it home. He wanted the sofa where she could see the boiling yellows and reds of the maples lining Fairway Avenue. The painting of fish and cheese and apples above the mantel gave way to an abstract print she'd bought at an auction in Toledo. Stan's obsession seized him and held him; finally it got to be more than I could take. One Saturday, while he was alphabetizing books in the den, I escaped to the garage where the chaos of the week before had been brought, in a couple of furious mornings, to an almost military order. Thin rolls of chicken wire fence, bicycles, a wicker bird cage, a tent, a bamboo rake—all of it hung neatly from spikes. In the corner above the hot water heater was a corroded set of J.C. Higgins golf clubs, which I yanked from the wall and kicked so the contents of the plaid bag spilled across the floor. I picked up an iron, stood in the center of the garage and swung the club as hard as I could over and over again. The sole clicked against the cement, making a trail of sparks. My follow-through barely missed the bug light suspended from a wooden beam. Somehow by swinging the club I seemed to cool down by degrees until the process was organic and regular like a heartbeat. Uptake, downswing and follow-through together made a wide arc resembling an invisible lariat.

That night I slept without dreaming of my mother in her orange robe and blue slippers, her body going into a furnace. I could never bear to think of her brown hair on fire. For once my dream found me standing in a patch of sunlight amidst tall pine trees, halfway up a narrow green fairway.

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Stan and I walked to see Mom twice every day. I'd come home from school and we would walk past the country club, through the brown leaves scattered on the sidewalk. "Your mother's quite a gal," he'd say. The leaves came in and out of focus for me. There were thirty-six telephone poles between our house and the Wood County Hospital. After pole number twenty came the small shopping center where we stopped occasionally. Lucille's Cafe was flanked by a flower shop and DiBennedetto's Grocery. On the way to see Mom we'd have a cup of coffee (Lucille had convinced Stan I was plenty tall and that he didn't have to worry about my growth being stunted) and a cinnamon roll at the cafe, after which Stan would buy some cut flowers in hopes he could convince Mom they were from the garden. But an early frost had wiped ours out, and I doubt she ever really thought those red chrysanthemums were from the garden. She wanted him to think he was fooling her, though. Her voice was low, like a man's almost, and halting. She'd say, "Oh . . . aren't they nice," and touch the stems. Then Stan would hold a plastic mirror for her while I brushed her hair.

Coming home we'd buy some frozen dinners and Coca-Colas and potato chips at DiBennedetto's. Then we'd cut across the golf course, provided it wasn't too wet. Stan would put his hand on my shoulder. "You like the turkey pies or the beef? I like the beef. Your mother likes the beef, too. . . ." The weather had turned the golf greens the color of straw, and the flags were gone from the metal poles. Sometimes it was possible to hear the greenskeeper filing the mower blades or banging at a piece of machinery inside the aluminum Quonset.

We always ate the pies from their tin containers. Then I'd go upstairs to do my homework while Stan sat motionless in front of the picture window and looked at the last golfers of the season in their fall windbreakers and heavy sweaters, pulling their carts in the last hour of gray light. Or maybe he was just watching a sluggish October fly crawl across the glass and the golfers were only blurred figures moving in the distance. From my desk in the bedroom I'd look out at the same scene. The golf course looked bleak to me. The golfers themselves seemed desperate, as if each shot were their last. It wasn't

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right that the swings were so choppy and clumsy or that the color was gone from the course. I'd go down to the garage and swing a golf club, imagining a white ball flying off toward a beautifully manicured green. I could feel banks of grass folding up around me like a blanket. When the garage windows went black I'd go inside to watch television with Stan.

My mother finally died on the fourth of November; Stan allowed her body to be cremated and we scattered her ashes in the garden behind the house as she'd requested.

After her death I devoted even more of my time to golf. I used the snowless November to practice. Stan was working late at the insurance office so I'd race home from school, take the clubs out from under my bed where they were hidden and sail out the front door to the golf course. A copy of Ben Hogan's *Power Golf* always went with me. The seventeenth tee was hidden from view of the clubhouse by an enormous barren forsythia hedge. In my cold hands I'd grip the club exactly as Ben Hogan suggested. I imitated all the diagrams of proper backswing, downswing and follow-through—hitting five or six shots off the tee, then retrieving the balls and hitting them again. Stan never returned home from work in time to discover what I was up to.

He had a bad reputation among the golfers who played the country club course across the street. Living on Fairway Avenue had poisoned him. Those windows that looked onto number seventeen had short life spans. Fortunately, Dexter's Glass Works had a stockpile of windowpanes pre-cut to fit our house perfectly. They were quick at repairs and Stan was probably the best customer Dexter ever had, and no doubt the most irate. Almost every week a hacker would slice his drive off number seventeen tee. The ball would land on the asphalt road, make a grandiose leap, and as if guided by radar, home in on one of our windows. There was the crash, and a Maxfli or a Titleist would dribble across the carpet, sometimes coming to rest at Stan's feet. When that happened his round face would contract slightly like a grape in the early stages of becoming a raisin and he'd lift the ball to his eyes. He'd glare at the thing, then storm to the front door for a face-off with the culprit.

Every now and then he'd find a golfer, spindly legs dan-

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gling from slack Bermuda shorts, preparing to ring the doorbell. Not to apologize or offer payment for damages, but to recover the ball. On one occasion Stan found someone worming beneath our station wagon. The man was yanked by his ankles onto the grass, and when he stood up he was greeted with an awkward punch that caused a bloody lip. There was supposed to be a lawsuit, but it never came about.

Enough was enough, though. Soon the house had shutters, and the stockade fence that had merely framed the house before was closed in on the fourth side so that the front yard became a kind of fort. Stan bought a Doberman pinscher that answered to exactly nobody, him included. To feed the dog he'd hurl a shank bone across the yard, and when Fritz ran snarling after it Stan would slide a bowl of Ken-L Ration through a crack in the door. It wasn't long before the Doberman was sold to an adult bookstore owner from Toledo, and replaced with an epileptic dachshund named Sally. The fence was plastered with signs, some of them handmade, others orange and black from the K-Mart. BEWARE OF DOG. TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED. WE ARE ARMED. LOST BALLS ACCRUE TO PROPERTY OWNER.

Vandals retaliated by painting the words FUCK YOU in two-foot-high red letters on the cedar boards. Stan called Garlington's Lumber Company, and they sent a young man to replace those boards. The next morning a new message for Stan appeared. EAT A RUBBER.

Mom was sure Stan had gone overboard. She argued against his crusade until the day she went into the hospital. One morning about a week after her admittance he was sitting at the breakfast table. "What sort of people live on this planet?" he asked me.

"Apes," I said, my mouth brimming with Shredded Wheat.

"Apes mind their own business. They eat their bananas and bamboo and do their crapping off . . . well, way off somewhere. These punks do their crapping all over everything and everybody. When I was a kid things were different, I'll tell you that."

Even several months later it was pretty clear to me that he'd never favor my taking up the game of golf. But practicing filled long vacant stretches of time when I would other-

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wise think about Mom. I read Ben Hogan's book from cover to cover maybe twenty times that winter after she died, and practiced on the sly.

When spring came my friends from school rode their bicycles past our yard. I could see their baseball hats skimming above the fence. They were flocking to the golf course, which was open to them on weekdays after school let out. I wanted to join them but I didn't think there was much point in asking permission from a man who considered golf one of the great American diseases.

There was no choice but to pull myself out of bed when the sky had barely turned pink over the smokestacks of the Heinz 57 Ketchup factory, visible from the bathroom window when I stood at the toilet. I'd hoist the golf bag over my shoulder, holding the cold steel clubs so they wouldn't rattle and wake Stan, and sneak down the stairs. I prayed they wouldn't creak. Sally had to be given some bologna from the refrigerator so she wouldn't whine or have one of her seizures when I went outside.

The mornings were cool and ketchup-smelling. Listening for the first birds, I would cross the street and walk up number seventeen fairway, then eighteen until I got to the clubhouse where the Miller High Life sign glowed through the curtains of the bar. From there the first tee was only twenty-five or thirty yards. But it was important to work at the practice green before heading to number one. When I putted, a little rooster tail was thrown up by the rotation of the ball on the wet grass. I'd take ten short putts, ten mediums, and ten long putts. Then it was time to go to the first tee.

In the quiet of the morning I could hear Arnold Palmer breathing as he waited at the bench. The course spread out before me was Augusta without the azaleas. Bobby Jones had seen to it that the greens were mowed to a slick thirteenth of an inch. Ben Hogan, "The Hawk," watched me from where he stood off to the left. I hit my drive pretty well. It was a dark speck in the morning light.

I heard Arnie tell Ben, "The kid's going places."

"Great tempo," said The Hawk. "A human pendulum."

I followed through the wet grass after a new Titleist, my only one. Dew soaked my sneakers and water trickled out of

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the metal shoe eyelets. When I turned to look back at the clubhouse, my footsteps were emerald green in the gray moisture that had settled during the night.

Sometimes starlings would be gathered at number one green, eating ungerminated seed. My approach shot would land in their midst, and they would scatter in a noisy swarming cloud, finally blackening the branches of the big Dutch elm.

If the club went back just right the weight of the steel club head would shift at the top of the swing, just like Ben Hogan said it should, and I was really throwing the blade down into the ball. The impact of clubface against ball came just before the leading edge of the club cut through the soft turf and tossed it into the air. When everything happened just right I'd drop the club and applaud. The morning was so still that my clapping would echo inside the tunnel of elms that darkened the fairway.

I returned from the golf course one morning and found Stan already up. He looked startled when I came through the door with my clubs. "So you're a golfer, eh?" he asked me. His voice had a hard ring to it, and there was a queer pitch to his bushy eyebrows. The chair he pulled out from the table for me squeaked against the linoleum, causing Sally to bolt from the dinette into the living room.

By that time my clubs were on the floor by the hatrack. I scratched an imaginary itch behind my ear.

"Can't you say something?"

"I was afraid to tell you . . . ," I said. ". . . the fence and all."

"Well, there's no need to be a damned sneak. I just don't like this damned sneaking-around-behind-my-back business." He waited for my apology, and once it was given he motioned for me to come through the wide arch to where he sat. I slid onto the seat and looked at the spoon Stan was aiming like a sword at my nose. He had a habit of pointing with anything handy—a pipe stem, a pencil, a spoon—when he was feeling emphatic. It was an authoritative technique he'd picked up from selling insurance policies to unwilling buyers. I took a slice of Wonder Bread from the loaf he'd brought to the table, folded the bread and took a bite from it. "You know

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what?" he asked, stirring his coffee. "I knew all along what you were up to."

I asked him how he knew and he said that Sally would stand broadside to the front door after I left in the morning and would whack the wood with that noodle tail of hers until he got up to let her out. My footsteps in the grass of the front yard had given me away. "Teddy, I don't care if you play golf. God knows I used to play a little bit myself. You could've told me. Just don't be one of those jerks out there with half their damn clothes off, cussing and throwing their clubs and pissing on trees." I saw him digging for the spoon again. He was on the brink of a big point. "If I ever catch you being anything but a gentleman I'll put those clubs up in the attic with the exercycle and the stuffed wolverine and that'll be *that*. Hear?"

So Stan was setting me free. From then on I gave up the early morning skulking, all that tiptoeing down the stairs. Spring and summer opened up like a broad fairway inviting endless golf shots. I emptied my savings account in favor of a junior country club membership.

Throughout the month of June I spent my days practicing. Shadows would swim back and forth across the grass as the sun drew from east to west. I mashed shot after shot through the mottled branches of a sycamore in the rough of number fifteen. Trees are theoretically ninety percent air, a supposition I put to the test. Twigs and leaves rained down when my ball clattered through or ricocheted off the wood. The tree was impenetrable and the theory proved a vast exaggeration.

Only darkness or throbbing hunger could drive me from the golf course, and even then I'd pore over golf magazines and instruction books and biographies of the game's greats—Guldahl, Travis, Nelson, Ouimet, Demeret, Snead. . . .

On weekends when the country club was overrun with duffers I'd drag a bushel basket of golf balls, the spoils collected over the years from bushes and flower beds, to the side of the yard nearest the driveway. I overturned the basket, then placed it empty at the other side of the lawn. My game was to chip the balls from where they were spilled into the basket sixty feet away. When he could, Stan would sit on the porch with Sally and watch me. My club bit into the lawn and there

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would be divot after divot. But he didn't seem to mind because he had a burlap bag of seed in the garage. Anyway, a temptation would sweep over him every now and then and he'd grab the club from me and take a few shots himself. Usually he'd blade the ball so it flew over the stockade fence into the neighbor's yard, or he'd scuff it so it would dribble only a few feet. When by some miracle one of the balls happened to rattle into the basket for him, he'd look at me and say, "See, it's a piece of cake if you do it right."

In the summertime, when dusk had chased the golfers off the course, Stan and I crossed the street and I practiced short irons, moving up from seven, to eight, to nine, to a full wedge . . . arcing the ball up into the pink sky where martins bored through the atmosphere in search of mosquitoes. The ball would be a black dot falling near a particular tree or sand trap. Stan lurked just out of range, a hulking silhouette, shagging balls for me. I imagined strange penalties for every bad shot—loss of thumb, wilted ear, a life of ugly pointed shoes like Stan wore when he raked leaves. I was working for perfection, that flawless contact of clubface on ball . . . drawing the iron back with the left hand to the top of the swing, pulling it down and through exactly as Hogan would, so the wrists broke into the ball exploding it skyward and down, toward the dim figure who scurried back and forth through the twilight.

Without Mom, our days together became ritualized that way. We continued to have supper once every week at Lucille's. She made pies from the sour cherries of her private orchard, and often she insisted on Stan taking a freshly baked one home with him. Every time we ate at the cafe, he'd leave a dollar bill under his plate for her. Lucille called my dad Stan, which seemed peculiar since even his clients called him Mr. Kendall, although he called them by their first names. Somehow she knew about my golf obsession. Maybe it was because my left hand was pale white from wearing a glove, or it might have been that she overheard Stan and me talking.

Jimmy, the club pro across the street, couldn't help noticing the hours I spent on the driving range or the putting green, deliberating over every swing as if the Masters were riding on

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it. He was an old shrunken Scotsman who'd more or less landed at the country club for what he called his "semi-retirement." Sometimes he'd come out of the clubhouse to watch me. He'd spit out his toothpick and grab the club away. "You've got to come to the inside with your uptake." His swing was slow and graceful. "Now let's see what you can do with it. Remember, inside. *Inside.*" I aimed at a pin oak three hundred yards out, took my swing, and watched the ball land halfway there and roll another sixty yards across the baked ground.

He would ride an electric cart alongside me when I played, occasionally jumping out to kick a perfect drive into the rough, or nudge the ball into a brown divot. "Now play the bleeding thing," he'd say. "You have to make the tough shots if you're to be any good." On the next hole he might roll the front tire of the cart over my ball, squashing it into the overwatered turf up by the green where the sprinklers had run overnight. "How are you going to play this shot, Teddy boy?"

Rather than ask Stan to pay for lessons, I accepted Jimmy's offer of a summer job at the clubhouse. That meant getting out of bed at 4:30, feeding Sally, then trotting in the dark to work. My job was to clean up the locker room, mop the floors, wash golf clubs belonging to members, and scrape accumulated mud and grass from golf shoes. Every now and then I would stand between rows of benches and swing a borrowed persimmon driver, grazing the rubber spike mat with the sole of the club. Or I would use someone's putter to roll golf balls from over by the urinals, through the corridor of lockers, down a concrete straightaway and into the shower, where the ball would orbit the drain grate seven or eight times before it spun dead center. There would be hysterics from the gallery, pats on the back from beautiful fragrant women . . . and I'd push aside all the microphones and autograph books in search of Stan or Jimmy.

At the first sign of light outside, I'd lock up and head for Lucille's. She liked me and let me drink all the coffee I wanted. "There's the golfer," she'd say when I came inside. Lucille ate too much of her own food, and as a result she was too fat for her yellow uniform. I'd sit at the counter and she'd talk to me. "Your dad says you're getting to be a good player." She

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always leaned across the counter in such a way that I could see between her big breasts. There was a white hankie down there. I wolfed my breakfast so I could get back to the course before the early golfers. That way I could play unimpeded.

The thing that troubled Stan most about the game of golf was its lack of *quid pro quo*. That was his favorite expression, *quid pro quo*. His poor clients got *quid pro quo*ed every time they filed a claim or bought one of his deluxe whole life policies. We'd be watching some tournament on the television and maybe the frontrunner's drive landed in a divot. The camera would zoom in on the white ball cradled in its unfortunate brown trench. Stan would come out of his chair. "Where's the goddamned *quid pro quo*? The game's not fair," he'd grumble. His insurance broker's brain was adapted to the equations and immutabilities of the actuarial charts. Lose a leg: thirty thousand bucks. An eye and an ear: forty thousand. An ear, a hand, a gonad, a toe and a left occipital lobe . . . he could figure it out. *Quid pro quo*.

I tried explaining that golf isn't something you can throw a rope around. It's a game of odd shapes and peculiar motions. A perfect drive can hit a sprinkler head and roll an extra hundred yards; or it can just as easily carrom out of bounds, or into a pine forest. A thinly struck five iron, destined for oblivion, can ricochet off a spectator's wheelchair and jump into the cup. Bobby Jones once landed his approach shot inside an anomalous shoe, itself atop a pile of sand heaped in a greenskeeper's wheelbarrow just beyond the putting surface. With his pitching wedge, Jones whacked ball and shoe onto the green, freeing one from the other, sank a long putt and salvaged par. I mentioned to Stan that Palmer had once sent a lofty fairway shot into a lady's purse, and on another occasion had rolled an errant tee shot into the dark interior of a supine spectator's pleated skirt. That's the rub of the green. You brain some unlucky man in the gallery with a towering wedge shot. He dies on the spot but your ball is one foot from the hole. You tap in. You take it. You play it as it lays.

On one of the first hot afternoons of that summer, Stan decided he'd like to come along while I played a round of golf. I did nothing worthy of mention on that day until I came to number fourteen, a par three reachable with a six

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iron. There was a deep quarry filled with water between the tee and the emerald tongue-shaped green. At the back of the green was a round white gullet of sand destined to swallow any shot flying too far. Stan, who insisted on carring my bag every other hole, handed me the six iron when I asked for it. He bent down, uprooted a few blades of grass and tossed them into the air. They floated briskly over his shoulder. I knew I'd have to lean into my tee shot.

I anchored myself over the ball, keeping my weight balanced until it shifted rearward on the uptake. I pulled the club down into the ball, which sailed in a gorgeous arc toward the target. The ball landed at the very back of the green, maybe a foot or two short of the trap, biting into the soft apron and rolling lazily down toward the flag. I leaned on my club and watched. "Will you look at that thing?" Stan said. "It's *beautiful.* I think the son of a bitch might go in." The ball curled across one side of a swale, gathering enough steam to climb the opposing rise, but always funneling toward the pin situated in the middle of the shallow trough.

"Roll," I said. "Get legs."

"The bastard's coming up short," Stan said.

"No. Watch it now. It's still moving." The ball crept toward the edge of the cup and seemed to hang there in defiance of known gravitational laws. Stan slung the clubs over his shoulder and trotted around the rim of the quarry, my irons clicking together at every footfall. I followed at a walk, never taking my eye from the ball that hovered at the brink of the cup.

Stan was already on hands and knees, his nose only inches from the ball, when I arrived at the green. A foursome on the nearby eleventh tee paused to watch this peculiar sight. The ball had in fact come to the very lip of the hole, where it seemed frozen, its round shadow darkening the white cylindrical liner. Stan stood up to let his wide shadow fall over the site of his anguish. (There is a theory—and where Stan had discovered it was a mystery to me—that shade causes an imperceptible wilting of grass.) Perhaps his porky penumbra would spill the ball into the hole. No luck. He jumped up and down, leaving size eleven footprints on the soft green. "It's not going in," I said. "The wind's not strong enough."

"It's got to fall," Stan insisted. He resumed his all-fours

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posture on the green and pushed his eyeball close to the recalcitrant, dimpled "sonofabitching" sphere. "You *bastard*," he whispered to the Titleist.

Players were now waiting at the tee behind us. "I'm going to tap it in," I told Stan.

"Like hell," he said. He filled his lungs and fiercely blew air like Buddha inventing wind. The ball teetered, then tumbled into the hole.

"What did you do that for?" I asked.

"It was a hell of a shot. The ball should have dropped."

"*Quid pro quo*, right?"

"Well. . . ." Stan shrugged.

On the next hole I drilled a wonderful tee shot that seemed to hang forever above a row of cedars.

A few days later, when I was washing up the supper dishes, Stan called me out into the living room and told me to sit down on the couch. "Wait right here," he said after I'd settled onto one of the cushions. He went to the closet and fished around behind some of Mom's coats and winter dresses until he'd found what it was he was looking for. It was a hickory shafted putter with a brass blade. "This is from Lucille," he said. "Before her husband passed away it was his. She wanted me to give it to you. What do you think?"

The putter had a new leather grip, and when I examined the sole of the blade I saw the word Schenectady imprinted there. I'd read about Walter Travis using such a putter throughout his golfing career at the turn of the century. He'd won the U.S. Open at Baltusrol with one just like it. My fingers trailed over the tiny nicks and dents. "It's a beautiful club," I said. "Probably it's seventy or eighty years old." I imagined Travis rolling a gutta percha ball over severely undulating greens.

Through the front window I could see that Jimmy had already taken in the rental carts. He'd closed up and gone home for the day. Still, I carried the putter across the street and raced through the waning light to number seventeen green, where I practiced until it was too dark to see.

Jimmy weighed the putter in his hands when I showed it to him the next day. "It's very valuable," he said. "I wouldn't use it except when you can be sure it won't be lost or stolen."

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I had the putter with me when I pushed into Lucille's Cafe that morning. She was serving old Mr. Farliss another cup of coffee. "Well, I see Stan gave you my present," she said.

"It's a great gift, Lucille," I said, and thanked her for it.

"I'm glad for someone to have it. It's been in my attic for . . . oh, I don't even know how long. It was Ernie's before he died, God rest his loving soul."

Ernie, as far as I could guess, was her husband. "Travis won the U.S. Open with a putter like this," I said, swiping at an invisible golf ball on the cork floor.

"Is that so," she replied. Her eyebrows floated up under her bleached blond bangs.

"He was one of the greatest players of all time."

"I'm happy you like that old club so much." She began wiping the counter with a gray rag, the fat of her arms bouncing as she did so.

During the following week I nearly wore out the putting green. Every putt was to win the Open. Sportscasters were buzzing about the thirteen-year-old "pheeenom" who had taken the pro tour by storm.

On the Fourth of July the country club always held its bingo bango bongo tournament, and then at dusk the fire department shot off fireworks. Club members began drinking beer in the morning and didn't stop until nightfall. They littered the fairways with Budweiser cans. Electric carts rolled off bridges into water hazards. Stan wouldn't allow me on the course while the festivities were taking place. But from my window I could see the red, white and blue pennants and the long tables set up in front of the pro shop.

Late that afternoon, Lucille, who had closed up her cafe for the holiday, drove her pickup truck into our driveway. I saw Stan go out to meet her. She looked like a big yellow flounder from my high vantage point. Lucille gave Stan a bucket of sour cherries from her orchard. He carried the bucket to the front porch and set it on the top step. They chatted for a long time after that. When she finally got back inside the truck, I watched them laugh over some joke Stan had made. It was probably an insurance man's joke—maybe the one about the divorcée who wanted to insure her pet monkey. That was one of his favorites. Lucille's hefty arm

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came out of the rolled-down window and touched Stan's cheek.

I lay on my bed, found a green page inside a golf magazine and pushed my face against it. Sporadic firecracker explosions sounded in the distance. I remembered my mother sitting on the front porch on the previous Fourth of July, a few weeks before the stockade fence went up, the lap of her skirt overflowing with green beans from the garden, and her snapping them into pieces which she dropped into a metal pail like the one Lucille had delivered to Stan.

When he knocked on the door of my room I sat up on the bed and told him to come in. "Lucille's going to join us for the fireworks display," he said. "How does that sound?"

I told him it was fine with me if that's what he wanted. He shut the door, and I listened to his footsteps on the stairs.

That night at about eight o'clock Lucille showed up at the front door with a grocery bag, grease spotted from the popcorn inside. I showed her into the living room and said that Stan would be down in a second. He was still upstairs smoothing his unruly eyebrows with candle wax, or at least that's what I thought.

"Well," said Lucille, groaning into a wing chair my mom had reupholstered a few months before she got sick, "how's that putter working out?"

"Fine," I said, and excused myself to see about Stan. He was in his bedroom, sliding a belt through the loops of his trousers.

"All set," he said. He sucked in his belly and checked himself in the mirror one last time before leading the way down to the living room. He handed Lucille a big army blanket from the hall closet. She smelled like cherries. Then Stan administered one of Sally's anti-seizure tablets, stroking the dog's throat so she would swallow it. "She's terrified of loud noises," he explained. The three of us went outside. We crossed the street, found a good spot halfway up number eighteen and spread out the blanket. Lucille and Stan sat there smiling and waving at everybody.

"Don't you want some popcorn?" Lucille asked, tilting the grocery bag toward me.

I told her I didn't want any; and of course, Stan never ate popcorn because the husks bothered his dentures. While Stan

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chatted about humidity and mortality tables, she ate every kernel. I watched kids wave sparklers in the gathering darkness.

When the light was gone from the sky the fireworks began with an explosion of red and green on the horizon. Lucille howled with delight after every burst, as if she were witnessing all this for the first time. She patted Stan's knee. "Aren't they *beautiful*?" she'd say, and Stan would nod.

I coaxed Sally into bed with me after Lucille had gone home and Stan had locked up the house. I heard him humming across the hallway. It was impossible for me to sleep.

Instead of going to work at the clubhouse when the alarm went off, I took the putter from my bag and plodded down the stairs as I'd done so many times before.

The eastern sky was tinged with color as I crossed the street and walked through the damp grass of number seventeen. The golf course was littered with the wreckage from the day before—paper bags, beer cans, unexploded firecrackers, candy wrappers. That Boy Scouts would be arriving soon to clean up the mess was no consolation to me. The fairways seemed corrupt and strange as I made my way toward the quarry situated deep inside the back nine. I could see Stan's window, still dark, when I paused to look back. I wondered what he was dreaming about.

I walked farther into the golf course, across number eleven fairway to the edge of the quarry, which was secluded by trees from the street where only occasional headlights gleamed through the branches. The weak morning sun threw the distant swales of the dog-legged water hole into relief. I'd played number eleven more times than I could count. I knew every roll from every part of that green. To my left was number fourteen, where I'd made my hole-in-one.

I stood at the rocky edge of the water for a few minutes. Finally, without really thinking much about it I threw the Schenectady putter out into the mist hovering over the quarry. I didn't feel much like going to work that morning.

I performed my various clubhouse chores in a completely perfunctory way, wrote Jimmy a note that said "Thanks for everything, but I have to quit," placed the key on top of the note and headed home.

Stan would be at his insurance office until late afternoon.

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So I took my bicycle from the garage and rode up to the Anthony Wayne Pike—something I was forbidden to do—and pedaled west. Lucille's orchard was five miles outside of town.

When her two-story house was in sight, I got off my bike and walked it the rest of the way. Lucille's yard was surrounded by cherry trees whose branches drooped under the weight of the fruit. I lay my Schwinn Corvette in a patch of long grass, longer than any rough at the country club, and sat down. The house was much larger than ours. Across the road were grazing cows and black oil derricks whose heads bobbed up and down like enormous mechanical birds. The farmland was too rocky and flat for a golf course, and the black ugliness of the oil pumps was a blight, and of course there were no sources of water for the creation of ponds and creeks, and except for the cherry trees the land was razed clean by the farmers and oil drillers. I imagined living in the farmhouse, eating Lucille's food, feeding chickens. Would we eat the chickens? I pulled myself up onto one of the gnarled tree branches and stayed there for a long time. What about Mom's ashes in our garden. Would we leave them behind for the new tenants of our house on Fairway Avenue?

I picked ripe cherries and lobbed them against the side of Lucille's house, leaving stains that looked like blood.

Dark clouds were huddling over the clothesline behind Lucille's, so I decided to ride back home. Wind was coming from the east, which always meant rain. I pedaled hard for half an hour before the first heavy drops plummeted down on me, stinging my face. Cars splashed past me in both directions, honked their horns and flicked their brights on and off.

The station wagon was in front of the garage when I turned onto the concrete driveway. Sally was standing in the wing chair at the picture window, her black nose pressed against the glass. Her breath made fog circles that appeared and disappeared.

As quietly as I could I opened the front door and went inside, leaving my wet shoes in the entryway. There was no sign of Stan. I presumed he was in the kitchen fixing hamburgers, but I couldn't smell them cooking if he was. I tiptoed up the stairs, past Stan's bedroom. He was sitting at the foot of his

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bed, staring across the room toward his bureau where there was a framed picture of Mom. "Where in the hell have you been?" he asked when he noticed me.

"I went for a bike ride," I said. I realized that my tee shirt was cherry stained.

"You might have left some message to that effect. Jimmy's been calling here about every ten minutes."

I told him I was sorry, and he said I'd better get cleaned up.

I sat in a tub of hot water for a long time, until Stan rapped on the bathroom door. "Come in," I said.

He sat down on the needlepointed toilet seat cover. He bounced the rubber plunger on the toe of his shoe for a while. "You could have been a little nicer to Lucille last night," he said. "She's awfully fond of you and it hurt her that you were so . . ." Stan didn't finish the sentence. He put the plunger behind the toilet. "Anyway, you might want to give the matter some thought." He got up and walked out of the bathroom.

We ate our beans and hamburgers in silence that night. I fed Sally chunks of meat under the table. When we were preparing to gather dirty dishes, Stan picked up a butter knife and peered at his reflection in the stainless steel blade. "You're worried about something, aren't you?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Well I know . . . and I can tell you what it is."

But I wouldn't let him say. Before he could tell me I ran up the stairs to my room, dropped onto my bed and stared at the ceiling. After a while I heard the phone ringing. Stan, who'd been watching a ball game on the TV, yelled up that it was Jimmy.

I picked up the receiver of the kitchen phone and held it against my ear. "I tore up that note of your, Teddy boy," the voice said. "You can't quit without two weeks' notice. I'm expecting you to be at work by five o'clock in the morning."

Before I could get back up to my room, Stan had filled the only avenue of escape, which was the arched kitchen doorway. When I tried to push by him he grabbed my shirt–sleeve. I yanked free from his grasp, ripping my shirt in the process. He pushed me against the refrigerator and held me

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there. His voice was shaking when he spoke. "Listen, Teddy. You have everything upside down. I'm not leaving this house, not with your mother's remains in the flower garden. And Lucille's not giving up her farm either. Anything else you can figure out for yourself." He took his hand from my chest and let me go. My eyes were wet and my jaws ached.

It was long after the last house lights had been turned off that I finally fell into a dark sleep. There were dreams, probably deep symbolic ones, but my mind was clean when I woke up.

I didn't go to work first thing that morning. I walked out the front door toward the golf course and the distant quarry. With me I had my swimming mask and a yellow towel. The air felt cool in my lungs. I found a wrinkled golf glove in the rough of number five. The little finger of the glove had been sheered off by the big four reel mower.

At the western edge of the quarry the water was shallow, with cattails spiking through the surface. I took off my clothes on the tee at number eleven and waded in. Mud oozed between my toes. I secured the mask, then glided head first into the water where I came face to face with minnows, swam through them, and resurfaced near the middle of the quarry. I took a deap breath so I could dive through the barely illuminated water to the murky bottom. Within a few minutes I'd located several dozen balls duffed into the pond by some of the club's worst golfers. However, the Schenectady putter was several yards farther out, in even deeper water; so I swam out, fearful of snapping turtles and other unknown dangers. My skin felt cold in the morning water. I drew in a huge breath and dove about fifteen feet to the bottom. Bluegills schooled around an old corroded refrigerator, squat on the mud bottom like a sunken frigate.

Although the sun was lending more and more light, there didn't seem to be much hope of finding the putter among the tires and bottles. I resurfaced one more time, swam a few yards farther out and went down again. I'd been down twenty or thirty seconds when I saw it, its shaft vertical like a reed. Although my lungs were near bursting, I clutched the putter and swam toward the pale expanse of light above me.

I sidestroked to the shallows and climbed up the bank,

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where I dried off. Without bothering to put my clothes back on, I grabbed an immaculate Titleist from the pocket of my jeans and walked toward number fourteen green. On the way, I clipped the heads off some stagweeds with my Schenectady.

I placed the ball at the fringe of the green, leaving myself a difficult fifty footer to win the Open. I analyzed the putting surface to detect its personality. The ball would travel over a mound, through a shallow valley and down. I rubbed my hand over the grass, feeling its texture and morning dampness.

Anchoring my bare feet firmly, I stroked the ball. I could read the print as my putt moved with the rise and fall of the green. It followed the path I'd planned for it, accelerating on the downslope of a small hillock, taking a harsh inward break, gathering momentum to climb the opposing rise, in the middle of which was the cup.

As the ball painted its dark green trail on the dew-covered putting surface, the gallery came to life. Their voices formed a chorus. "Get going." "Get legs." "Go." "Roll." The putt had been struck perfectly. The line had been correctly calculated. The speed was right. The ball was destined to fall for me, dead center.

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GEORGE WATSON

# The Reckless Disciple: Godwin's Shelley

Since death by water in 1822, at an age not quite thirty, Shelley has seldom won an acclaim from political thinkers to match his fame as a poet. In a famous essay of 1888, Matthew Arnold spoke of his "availing nothing, effecting nothing." By an odd coincidence, it was in the same year that Karl Marx's daughter Eleanor and her lover Edward Aveling published two lectures on *Shelley's Socialism,* enlisting him hopefully in what they supposed to be the coming class struggle. But their little book was limited to an edition of twenty-five copies, and Arnold's verdict stood: a dazzling poetic genius who had nothing severely useful to say to any succeeding generation of mankind, or at least of Englishmen.

All that still looks like a fair summary of Shelley's failure to influence the highly parliamentary state that emerged, just ten years after his death, out of the first Reform Act of 1832. His political admirers have commonly been extra-parliamentary in their loyalties. Shelley had been a utopian in a pure sense: a sense far too pure for the British nation, certainly, which was to take a more pragmatic course. He had praised a political idea that existed nowhere but in the mind, as he perfectly knew; and one which, as he could not know, would never be born even after his death. That purity of intent left him without purpose to the Victorian mind, though not without appeal. Towards the end of his century, his old college in Oxford, mindful of having once expelled him, erected what they supposed a fitting tribute in expiation. Carved in white marble by Onslow Ford in 1892, the memorial in University College shows a naked youth washed up on the Italian seashore, all pure romantic symbol. The truth is that there is unromantic evidence that his drowned body was washed up fully clothed—in a double-breasted jacket, nankeen trousers,

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stockings and even boots. But that shining marble at Oxford is an abiding symbol of his political influence. In the world of ideas, Shelley is nakedly the type of romantic failure.

As a cause, Shelley's utopia leads nowhere, least of all in his native land. It emerged, however, from a treatise largely composed while he was still in the womb: Godwin's *Political Justice,* which appeared in January 1793 when the poet was an infant in arms. Shelley proclaimed his discipleship as a young man; and when he eloped with Godwin's daughter Mary in 1814, he visibly confirmed it. Any sense in which Shelley's utopia differed from Godwin's, then, is likely to be unintentional. But it does differ, after all, and enormously; and Godwin himself saw that it did. The son-in-law was a recklessly inaccurate disciple, though the nature of that inaccuracy has never been fully exposed.

Shelley's relation with Godwin started at the age of nineteen, in January 1812, shortly after the poet had been expelled from Oxford. It began with a fan-letter. Shelley addressed Godwin adoringly as "a luminary too dazzling for the darkness which surrounds him," adding artlessly that he had only recently discovered him to be still alive. His immediate suggestion was that they should meet and become soul-mates:

> I have but just entered on the scene of human operations, yet my feelings and my reasonings correspond with what yours were.

That laid the responsibility upon Godwin to demonstrate any difference of view: a thoroughly Shelleyan gesture.

In the event they were not to meet for nearly a year, and the meeting of October 1812 was disappointing. Godwin seemed disconcertingly aged and passionless: over-eager for homage and, as his future son-in-law was one day to discover to his embarrassment and cost, for financial subsidy as well. He was even unsympathetic to Shelley's poetry, where he found too much "sparkle and glittering." It is the more remarkable that Shelley should continue to be attracted by the cool, analytical prose of *Political Justice,* a late outflowing of the European Enlightenment and, already twenty years old, by then something of a forgotten book. It had proclaimed universal benevolence as a political principle, setting itself

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against anything in its way: religion, promise-keeping, even the very institution of marriage. Shelley embraced all these views. But he embraced them in a manner and with a fervour that Godwin, from the start, simply could not countenance.

Godwin's most general objection to Shelley was that the young man was hopelessly extreme. *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811), a pamphlet that had led to his expulsion from Oxford, struck the older man as largely a misunderstanding of *Political Justice,* and one far more likely to do harm than good. That was because its call for organized societies or "associations" against the state could so easily lead to bloodshed, threatening (as Godwin put it in a severe letter) to "light again the flames of rebellion and war" (4 March 1812). Godwin's letter reproached the dead Rousseau, and by plain implication the young Shelley too, for the over-hasty publication of inflammatory ideas, and those of a sort likely to incite violent political change. At this earliest stage in a difficult relationship, it is plain that Godwin did not consider Shelley an orthodox Godwinian at all, though it seems equally plain that Shelley himself ardently wished to be one.

Shelley's first extended poem, *Queen Mab* (1813), has been seen as Godwin versified, and it is true that its distance from *Political Justice* lies in tone rather than in substance. But then tone can all but equal substance in political declamation; and there is a world of difference between Godwin's Enlightenment prose, unfailingly scrupulous and analytical in argument as it is, and the flaming torch of Shelley's verse:

> Whence, think'st thou, kings and parasites arose?
> Whence that unnatural line of drones, who heap
> Toil and unvanquishable penury
> On those who build their palaces, and bring
> Their daily bread?—From vice, black loathsome vice,
> From rapine, madness, treachery and wrong. . . .
> III.118-23

That language of vilification is as remote from the Enlightenment spirit as had been Wordsworth's youthful protestations in the early 1790s. History seemed to be repeating itself, and alarmingly. Conservatives long before the end of the wars

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with Napoleon, the first generation of English romantics could not fail to perceive in Shelley a disturbingly renewed image of their own youth. "Here is a man in Keswick," Southey wrote to a friend in January 1812, "who acts upon me as my own ghost would do. He is just what I was in 1794," adding that he had evidently come to the right place to have the nonsense knocked out of him. Shelley's revivalism took them by surprise, and it remains surprising: rather like the 1960s revival of 1930s Marxism. His fondness for rhetorical questions, too, smacking as it does of the soap-box, was understandably seen as inflammatory, even if he goes on to predict a bloodless revolution where the authority of kings "will silently pass away." The trouble is that, as so often in this poet, it is less the conclusion that impresses than the sheer rhodomontade that inspires the body of the work.

There is a more particular difference. It is that Godwin was simply hostile to revolution, whether bloodless or bloody. Shelley, at least until the last year or two of his life, was its most public advocate in English verse, though he employs the word itself surprisingly little.

Godwin's attitude to revolution was remarkably modern, in the sense that it belonged less to eighteenth-century (and earlier) uses than to our own. In earlier times, revolution had commonly signified something conservative, when it signified anything political at all. As the revolution of a wheel or planet brings things back to where they started, so does a political revolution restore such matters as ancient rights and liberties. Godwin is perhaps the point in English political debate at which the word finally and irrevocably turns, and nobody by now doubts that it is a word for radicals. Unlike Paine or Burke, or the men of 1689 before them, Godwin recognizes no conservative or restorative use for the term. Revolution for him, as for us, is left-wing—"instigated by a horror against tyranny," as he puts it in *Political Justice* (IV.ii) uncompromisingly, as if the restorative use of 1689 had never even been mooted. It is the total context of the remark that makes it decisive. Godwin does not look to any past, real or imagined, for his political inspiration. Nor does the prospect of mere Machiavellian revolution interest him, where power is

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seized and held for its own sake—or at least for reasons which, in Machiavelli's *Prince,* remain studiously unmentioned. The preface to *Political Justice* is dated January 1793; and if these sentences were written during 1792, as seems likely, then they represent a remarkably early instance of the radical sense of "revolution" as something natural, absolute and unqualified.

It is the more remarkable, then, that Godwin should proceed to attack radical revolution on grounds that are themselves specifically radical. Godwin is a convinced gradualist, and his argument amounts to setting up one kind of political change against another—reforming against revolutionary, gradual against Jacobin: ". . . yet its own tyranny," he continues, still speaking of revolution, "is not without peculiar aggravations." A revolutionary hatred of tyranny, in other words, can all too easily lead one back into tyranny, as Napoleon and Stalin were eventually to prove. That passage abundantly explains Godwin's objection to Shelley's flaming rhetoric, in a letter he was to send him twenty years later. Revolution tends to revert to tyranny, Godwin had argued in 1793, because "there is no period more at war with the existence of liberty" than one of political violence. Free speech is then "trebly fettered," and "slavery is complete." None of that sounds like a critique of the English Revolution of 1689 or of the American of 1776, neither of which is usually thought of as having led to any notable enlargement of state censorship. If it is about anything in particular, it can only be about France. The more remarkable, in that case, that it should be written months before the Terror of 1793-94 began. In other words, Godwin's treatise, which has somehow acquired a reputation for empty bombination and cloud-building political fantasy, analyses the concept of revolution in a way that now makes most earlier English uses look obsolete, and in accurate prophecy identifies the dangers of sudden political change as well.

Godwin's resolute gradualism makes him, at times, look (in that respect at least) incongruously like Edmund Burke. And in his lively appreciation that blood will have blood in political change, he emphatically is. The contrast between them, which remains enormous, lies in Godwin's unfailing disposition to intellectualize and abstract what was always for Burke a par-

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ticular and rootedly national issue. For Burke liberty was English, and derived from 1689; other nations might envy it—might even, if wise and fortunate, attempt to follow. Godwin's view, by contrast, was as startlingly universal as Shelley's was to be. He is dismissive of merely national characteristics, and the traditional native strengths of the British constitution that had enthralled Burke and Gibbon seem to have been a matter of utter indifference to him. "As to the demand upon me for support to the English constitution because it is English," he wrote disdainfully in *Political Justice* in a section prudently dropped from later editions, "there is little plausibility in this argument" (IV.ii)—any more than there would be to call upon some one to be a Christian merely because he lived in a Christian land, or to be a Moslem because he happened to be a Turk. The appeal of Godwin is always to reason exercised in open debate; and mere patriotism "forbids us the exercise of our reason." That makes him more an Enlightenment man, if severely defined, than much of the Enlightenment itself. Montesquieu had based his constitutional views on his admiration for the British system of 1689; but like Rousseau before him, Godwin found that view too particular and too partial, and altogether too little concerned with eternal principle, to carry conviction. His theme is not England, at any time, but mankind.

Godwinism is true for all, then, if it is true at all. "Politics is a science," he proclaimed (IV.ii), echoing the title of Hume's famous essay "That politics may be reduced to a science." Of course it needs to take note, as sciences do, of "the variation of circumstances," or the special conditions of a given nation at a given time. It is all the more scientific for that. No wonder, then, if Godwin is opposed to bloodless as well as to bloody revolution. If politics is a science, then (like other sciences) it is "progressive in its advances." And sudden revolution, like the rush and verve of Shelleyan verse itself, does not allow for the reflection or continuous adjustment of view that such advances constantly require. Being unreflective, revolution is violent almost by its nature: "Perhaps no important revolution was ever bloodless." Being "the produce of passion, not of sober and tranquil reason," it is fated to fail in whatever may have been its first and most fragile hopes.

This is a notable argument. It makes a case for seeing revo-

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lution as radical—a view still unfamiliar in its age—and then proceeds by reasonable stages to demolish it. The history of the past two centuries has done much to confirm Godwin's analysis. On the other hand, it is an analysis that wears better in its amended form than in its first edition. De Quincey was to exaggerate wildly, though amusingly, when he claimed in his 1845 essay on Godwin that the second edition of *Political Justice* (1795) is "absolutely a travesty of the first" two years earlier—"nay, it is all but a palinode," a retraction. That is over-statement. So is his complaint that Godwin's revisions are inexplicable as to motive. They can be readily explained. They were made because the rush of events in France with Robespierre's terror of 1793-94 had made them, as revisions, inevitable.

In the first edition of 1793, recent revolutions in America and France were hailed by Godwin as built on "a general consent of all orders and descriptions of men"—unlike the unhappy violence of the English Civil War. But it is only in that first edition that Godwin dared to conclude hopefully that recent events like 1776 and 1789 were relatively bloodless victories for the spirit of Enlightenment:

> If these revolutions had happened still later, not one drop of the blood of one citizen would have been shed.
>
> IV.ii

Non-violence comes from Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau, so he argues; and he calls on other nations to follow France, "the most refined and considerable nation in the world." But January 1793, or months before the Terror, was an unfortunate moment to make such a claim, and it is wholly unsurprising if these passages should have been quickly stripped away.

And yet Godwin was surely right to see that he could denude his argument of its unlucky historical instances, as he did, and still leave its essential case against revolution unaltered. In that dignified reply to his critics, *Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon* (1801), he frankly acknowledges once again that *Political Justice* had been "the child of the French revolution"—when so many, and so un-

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derstandably, had "worshipped the rising sun," only to be "miserably disappointed." But the charge he then makes in that telling little pamphlet against his unnamed adversaries, who may well include Wordsworth and Coleridge, is after all cogent. It is that "shame . . . for a long time held them to their point" as lovers of the French Revolution: unmoved by Burke's *Reflections* (1790), unmoved by the deposition and execution of Louis XVI, unmoved even by massacre. Godwin had seen the point at once, in 1793-95, or between his first and second editions. Others had not; and his praise for their "constancy" may be presumed ironic, though Godwin is no great master of irony. They had changed only in 1797, or later.

> But why . . . should I be made the object of their invective? I never went so far in my partiality for the practical principles of the French revolution as many of those with whom I was accustomed to converse. I uniformly declared myself an enemy to revolutions.

We are fortunate, in the Florida edition of Godwin's *Uncollected Writings*,[1] to possess a facsimile of the British Museum copy of this pamphlet, with Coleridge's indignant (and occasionally admiring) marginalia. The cap, as Coleridge knew, fitted, and fitted too well.

All that makes Godwin look like a cautious thinker, and there are important and neglected senses in which he is. He is openly hostile to sudden political change. He neither seeks nor expects perfection in any future state, holding perfectibility to be an unending capacity to improve rather than the attainment of an ideal. He is only ultimately and remotely an anarchist, calling government "a necessary evil" (II.1) and society "a blessing," educating as it does mankind into virtue. Philosophical anarchism does not emerge from *Political Justice,* even in its first and most daring edition, as a rash or silly doctrine, though like all doctrines of universal benevolence it is sometimes open to the charge of priggery. Its attack on Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is bitter, but it remains highly distinct from Tom Paine's. Godwin scornfully

[1] *Uncollected Writings (1785–1822) by William Godwin*, ed. by J. W. Marken and B. R. Pollin (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968).

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rebuts Burke's anguished cry, as he contemplated the rough handling of Marie Antoinette, that "the age of chivalry is gone." If only it were . . .

> The feudal spirit still survives that reduced the great mass of mankind to the rank of slaves and cattle, for the service of a few. VIII.iii

And Godwin's attack on Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791-92) and its total concept of political rights adopts a distinct third position in the acrimonious British debate over recent events in France. Since reason in the pursuit of happiness is supreme, Godwin argues, no society or elected assembly has the right to act against the general happiness. "There cannot be a more absurd proposition than that which affirms the right of doing wrong" (IV.v). So even political democracy is not, or not certainly, the desired utopia of the Godwinian anarchist. That makes his radicalism look at once more abstract and, for just that reason, less dangerous than Paine's. All of which may help to explain their divergent fates. Paine had fled to France in 1792, months before *Political Justice* appeared; Godwin, by contrast, contrived to stay harmlessly at home.

The puzzle here is to be sure what Shelley made of all this, and how much Godwin would have approved of what he did make of it.

Shelley's non-violence, at least, may be called unimpeachable, and in a strict sense that is true. "I wish no living thing to suffer pain," exclaims the hero of *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) as, chained to the rock, the Titan contemplates the inevitable fall of the tyrant Jupiter, revoking the curse he had once pronounced upon him. Demogorgon's speech at the end of the drama memorably summarizes the cause of political non-violence for all the ages:

> To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
> To defy power which seems omnipotent;
> To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates . . .

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Godwin had prudently abstracted his case in later editions of *Political Justice* by reducing specific allusions to recent revolutions, American and French. Shelley was to carry that principle of abstraction to its ultimate limit. There was nothing, after all, in the more notable events of the 1810s to encourage a creed of non-violence, and Shelley knew there was not. As an eighteen-year-old, in 1810, he had translated a stanza of "La Marseillaise"—"Tremble, Kings despised of man!"—but 1810 is an improbably late date for eulogizing the French Revolution, and Shelley never published what may have been no more than a poetic exercise. In the preface to *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) he speaks regretfully of "the excesses consequent upon the French Revolution," meaning the Terror, which (as he candidly admits) created a panic of reaction among "all classes of men," and not just the rich and the powerful. He can have known of no demand whatever for revolution at home. Contemporary in his publishing career with such conservative novelists as Jane Austen and Walter Scott, he is consciously a radical writing in a Tory time, in the grim years that surrounded the defeat of Napoleon. Though he can react bitterly to such current events as the Peterloo massacre of 1819 in *The Mask of Anarchy,* he must have known that there was little or nothing of a positive and encouraging sort to be taken in evidence from the headlines. His sonnet on the fall of Napoleon, "Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte" (1816), has nothing of Byron's ambiguity of emotion, and begins: "I hated thee, fallen tyrant . . ." There is no promised land for Shelley anywhere on earth; at least, not yet.

For just that reason, perhaps, revolution plays no special part in Shelley's rhetoric of political change. The only notable use of the term in his verse, in *Peter Bell the Third,* written in Italy in 1819, is no more than whimsical and perfunctory:

> There is great talk of revolution—
> And a great chance of despotism—
> German soldiers—camps—confusion—
> Tumults—lotteries—rage—delusion—
> Gin—Suicide—and methodism. . . .
>
> III.vi

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That is the Byronic side of Shelley, who can be more of a cynic than his reputation allows. Nor does he parade much interest in the world of modern ideas beyond Godwin, though he possessed the works of the *philosophes* and visited Lausanne out of an admiration for Gibbon. In his last poem, *The Triumph of Life,* the great Voltaire emerges ambiguously among the doomed crew. His friendship with Thomas Love Peacock, too, suggests that the refined, mocking tone of the Enlightenment may have had a personal appeal for him.

And yet Shelley is not often a witty writer, like Voltaire, Gibbon or Peacock, or anything like as good a knockabout humorist as Byron. Perhaps the best joke he ever made was one against himself, in the preface to "Julian and Maddalo": there, after describing Byron as Maddalo, he adds briefly of himself: "Julian is rather serious." It is hard not to love him, after that. He knew his own limits as a wit; he was not often an analytical writer, like Godwin; and he is not known to have had any influence upon events, as Byron did in Greece. In short, he was less of a political activist than a poet without a constituency in his own times; and the immense pace and passion of his verse strike one as an effect of mind rather than a design to impress. His world is so much his own, indeed, that it is often unclear whether he is misunderstanding his sources or boldly rewriting them.

One emphasis, at least, is entirely Shelleyan, occurring neither in Godwin nor (to my knowledge) in any other political source. That is Shelley's emphasis upon words.

I know of no other political apologist who lays so strong an accent upon what the detested institutions of the world are called. It is as if Shelley had never noticed Gibbon's subtle point in *Decline and Fall* (Ch. 3) that "mankind is governed by names"; remarking there how tyrants like Augustus Caesar had escaped popular indignation by cunningly preserving the ancient titles of free institutions like Senate and Parliament.

Shelley admired Gibbon, but that was not his view. He often writes as if the worst thing about a priest or a king is the fact that he is called that. It is rather as if Ozymandias' mis-

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take of supposing that his name guaranteed an everlasting authority were Shelley's own:

> "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
> Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"

A modern radical is inclined to object that it is not the *name* of king or priest that matters, but the functions traditionally associated with those names. Phenomena are not resemblant merely by virtue of sharing a common title, as the People's Democracies of eastern Europe have recently and abundantly proved. Nobody is tyrannical for being called a king, even if some kings are tyrannical. To a century repeatedly assured of the Arbitrariness of the Sign, this aspect of Shelley's radicalism has not worn well:

> Oh, that the free would stamp the impious name
> Of KING into the dust!

he exclaims in the "Ode to Liberty," written early in 1820 in support of a rising against the Bourbons in Spain; and he continues:

> That the pale name of PRIEST might shrink and dwindle
> Into the hell from which it first was hurled.

When Jupiter asks Demogorgon who he is, in *Prometheus Unbound,* he replies impressively: "Eternity. Demand no direr name" (III.i.52). That is boldly conceived, as drama; but it points to a strange, echoing obsession in Shelley's mind with what things are called. Why did it matter so much to him? Was it a poet's fascination with language, perhaps, that made him think language less an instrument than an end? But then other poets—all poets—are fascinated with language.

> One curse alone was spared—the name of God

is an odd emphasis in a poet who, when he wrote *Queen Mab,* was already passionately anti-Christian, but far less certainly

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atheistical. Names admittedly carry good and evil associations: God, priest and king arguably mean what Christian Europe has made them mean. It is Shelley's own brand of political simplicity not to notice that they might some day come to mean something else, and that in any case it is what men are that counts.

A more plainly Godwinian emphasis lies in Shelley's sense of the moral will. For Godwin, and for his young disciple, the human will is not innately corrupt, as Christians believe. It is merely weak; and evil constitutions like tyranny are responsible for tempting it into evil. There is no original sin, in this view, and vice is only error.

In all that Shelley is a faithful disciple. Atonement and eternal punishment are "inexplicable and incredible," Shelley argues Godwinianly in a note to *Hellas* (line 197). And yet the true answer to the enigma of evil remains to the end unclear. Though "there is a true solution of the riddle," it is unattainable in our present state. Evil states of mind, and the actions to which they give rise, are entirely caused. What is more, the Godwin circle can approach the perilous (and potentially criminal) view that causation weakens, even annuls, moral responsibility. When Shelley reviewed his wife's novel *Frankenstein* (1818), he denied that the monster's crimes were "the offspring of any unaccountable propensity to evil"—on the alarming ground that they "flow irresistibly from certain causes fully adequate to their production"—the children of "Necessity and Human Nature." That is a long, dark tunnel that Shelley, perhaps fortunately, does not explore. Coleridge, too, had passed through a necessitarian phase in youth, and Shelley can flirt with the notion that our moral life might be attributed solely to our conditioning. As he remarks indulgently of the Maniac in "Julian and Maddalo": "Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked."

Like most determinists, fortunately, Godwin and Shelley can implicitly contradict themselves. Prometheus, though chained to the rock and undeniably "treated ill," can still behave nobly and revoke the curse on Jupiter. Heroism lies in stepping outside the seemingly determined patterns of life. When Falkland refuses to fight a duel in Godwin's first novel,

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*Caleb Williams* (1794), he utters an intensely Godwinian perception to justify a refusal that might, to the world's eye, look merely cowardly and dishonouring:

> "I can only be dishonoured by perpetuating an unjust action. My honour is in my own keeping, beyond the reach of all mankind. Strike! I am passive . . ."

Shelley's Prometheus repeats that ideal of heroism: he is passive to the eye of the onlooker, active in his audacity to breach convention. In Godwinian terms, the supreme heroism is to do nothing but explain, educate, and argue.

It is beyond doubt, then, that Shelley often understood what he read in *Political Justice*. His powers of philosophical summary are in general remarkable. The account of Plato's Doctrine of Forms in "Adonais," for example, is commendable to this day as an efficient sketch of the doctrine itself:

> The One remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly. . . .
> stanza 52

In a similarly efficient and luminous way, the cyclical theory of history found in Plato's *Timaeus* is expounded at the end of *Hellas*:

> Oh, cease! must hate and death return?
> Cease! must men kill and die?
> Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
> Of bitter prophecy . . .

That makes it all the harder to convict Shelley of careless misunderstanding or mere inattention. True, he could get things wrong. But his mind was attentively engaged and desperately serious—much more than "rather serious"—and he is said to have claimed to have read *Political Justice* through seven times. His allusions to Plato suggest a tough-minded grasp of philosophical essentials; he knew six foreign languages, including Greek and Latin, even if his German was shaky; the

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translations and parodies show him a mighty master of literary pastiche; and he was highly accomplished, unlike many radicals, at slipping into the minds of other men. Odd that *A Defence of Poetry*, which was written in 1821, should speak of "the vanity of translation," comparing it vividly to the vain business of casting a violet into a crucible to analyse its odour or smell. That, after all, is just what Shelley successfully does with his great originals, at his best. And it cannot be said of what is done that it is impossible to do. Shelley is a hugely perceptive reader. To insist on the supremacy of mind over matter, for example, is eminently Godwinian, and far more memorable in the mouth of Prometheus or Demogorgon than in the scrupulously frigid prose of *Political Justice*. So is the doctrine of non–violence. What is not Godwinian, in the end, is the poetic pace at which these events are forced to move.

The issue of pace is, in the end, of vital importance. There is no clear hint in *Political Justice* that non-violent reason is about to take possession of the political affairs of mankind; and optimistic references to the American and French revolutions were quickly expunged by Godwin after the first edition of 1793. Things are improving, so he would have us understand; they are improving, above all, because mankind has been reading Locke and the *philosophes*; and they might improve still more if they read Godwin. The Enlightenment is educating mankind slowly towards rational perfection. But there is no time-limit to the Godwinian utopia. It may take till the end of the world.

Shelley does not allow of that interpretation, either in verse or prose. His prose *Philosophical View of Reform*, written in Italy in 1819 and unpublished in his lifetime, is manifestly a call for instant political action against the European tyrannies that had been restored after Napoleon's defeat. His political verse is equally inciting:

> Men of England, wherefore plough
> For the lords who lay ye low?

That is the Shelley admired of Marx's daughter, and it comes as a surprise to discover that the poem ends not with a call to action, as one expects, but on a note of defiant despair that is totally un-Marxian:

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> With plough and spade, and hoe and loom,
> Trace your grave, and build your tomb,
> And weave your winding–sheet, till fair
> England be your sepulchre.

What is one to make of that? The substance of the poem, taken as a whole, is at least arguably non-violent; its pace and tone tell another story. Written in 1819, and abroad, it was never published in his lifetime, perhaps for prudent reasons. Had Shelley published it, and been tried for treason, it is easy to imagine the defence he might have submitted: that there is not a word about violence in the entire poem, apart from a reference to soldiers' arms:

> Why shake the chains ye wrought? Ye see
> The steel ye tempered glance on ye.

All that might satisfy a court of law. It does not satisfy the reader. Shelley's political verse is grim with the imagery of violence, and sulphurous with hatred. His "Similes for Two Political Characters of 1819," equally unpublished in his lifetime, is a twisted mass of images of croaking ravens, human carrion, sharks and vultures. He even wrote, but did not publish, "A New National Anthem," in the familiar metre of the old one, where "God Save the Queen" is treasonably addressed not to any human monarch but to divine love. The sonnet "England in 1819" bluntly calls George III "old, mad, blind and dying," his sons "the dregs of their dull race" and his ministers leeches. He can begin an ode to the Spaniards in October 1819 with "Arise, arise, arise!" If Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography* (1850) is to be believed, he once told a Hampstead resident who had refused to shelter a poor woman that his house would be burned over his head. The rhetoric of direct action seems to have flared out of him on any provocation. He is the poetic equivalent of that familiar modern paradox, the violent peace-marcher.

It would be idle, then, and even belittling, to deny that Shelley was a treasonable writer; and superfluous to doubt that the revolutions he longed for were imminent to his imagination, and likely on any reasonable view to shed blood. If his difference with Godwin, from the *Necessity of Atheism*

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onwards, lay less in substance than in tone, it is still clear that Godwin was fundamentally right to fear that his disciple had mistaken him. This is one of those occasions where a spoken accent of voice, or a stylistic insistence on the printed page, can outweigh any defence founded on literal interpretation or paraphrase.

Shelley himself lived to believe he had gone too far, politically speaking; though there is no reason to suppose that in the last year of his life he gave much sympathetic thought to the ageing and embarrassingly importunate father-in-law whose career had, by then, faded into semi-obscurity.

Plato had led him back to God, or at least to the One; and he even lived to complain, in "England in 1819," that the Church establishment was "Christless, Godless": an odd charge, one might think, from the author of *The Necessity of Atheism*. Maddalo, who speaks for Byron, teases Julian about a blasphemous remark as they ride together on the Lido of Venice, but with a clear implication that Shelley's atheism belongs to his youth: "You talk as in years past." And if Peacock is faithful to memory, Shelley's mind even moved towards a sort of late Coleridgean conservatism that could pay homage to the civilizing influences of a parish clergy. "I feel strongly inclined to enter the Church," he is reported to have remarked to Peacock on a country walk, presumably near Marlow in 1817, as they admired a vicarage, explaining that he had come to regard the supernatural parts of Christianity as "merely technical." He was, he claimed, "a more decided disciple" of Christian morality, by then, than many a clergyman:

> And consider for a moment how much good a clergyman can do. In his teaching as a scholar and as a moralist; in his example as a gentleman and a man of regular life. . . .
>
> *Fraser's Magazine*, June 1858

He even praised the Church as an institution: "It is an admirable institution that admits the possibility of diffusing such men over the surface of the land." By 1817 that had long since been the view of the ageing Wordsworth and Coleridge. If Shelley voiced it at the age of twenty-five, then he had independently reached a position not very different from that of the first generation of English romantics at a similar age,

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in the mid 1790s. History was repeating itself in more ways than one. And though it may be idle to speculate on what Shelley would have believed had he lived into middle life, it is at least clear what he had already decided to be the chief cause of disillusion among radicals, in any generation. It is the simple fact that they get older.

*The Triumph of Life* is a poem about how life itself triumphs over the clarities and absolutes of youthful conviction. Composed on the Gulf of Spezia in the spring and early summer of 1822, it is emblematically unfinished, being cut off by death at sea. But fragmentary though it is, its wider sense is still clear. Life triumphs over faith; then death triumphs over whatever is left of life. Its metre—an imitation of the *terza rima* of Dante's *Divine Comedy*—may have some emblematic value too, since Dante's is a dream–poem composed out of the sobering effects of middle age, "the middle of the way that is our life."

Shelley is that rare sort of imitator who does not belittle his models. The startling appearance of Rousseau in his poem, at once comic and horrific, is as memorable as anything in *Inferno*, and exemplifies what it is about the whole business of living that is ultimately amiss. It is life itself. Life kills ardency and idealism by its sheer minute-by-minute insistence—by what in "Adonais" Shelley had called "the world's slow stain." As a great composer was one day to write as his epitaph, life steals more from you than death. The figure of Rousseau here, the very type of the philosophical reformer, is at first mistaken by the dreamer for a contorted root growing out of the hillside, his hair taken for grass and his eyes for holes.

Rousseau was for Shelley the type of those who had once believed in utopia and universal schemes of knowledge, in "thought's empire over thought." But the thinkers who had made the French Revolution had overreached themselves:

> ". . . their lore
> Taught them not this, to know themselves; their might
> Could not repress the mystery within."

Universal theories of justice, in a word, forget the human fal-

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libility of the theorist. They are vainglorious. And the men of action who follow the theorists are defeated as surely as they. For the next figure in Shelley's *Inferno* is Napoleon:

> "Who is he with chin
> Upon his breast, and hands crossed on his chain?"

the dreamer asks, and turns pale at the answer: "Fallen, as Napoleon fell." So men of action, as well as thinkers, fail. There is no easy or even probable connection in politics, indeed, between intention and effect, between "good and the means of good"; there may even be a malign law that actively forbids universal schemes to achieve anything like their intended purpose. That supreme paradox of political action was Shelley's last memorable political perception:

> . . . why God made irreconcilable
> Good and the means of good . . .
> . . . The world and its mysterious doom
> Is not so much more glorious than it was,
> That I desire to worship those who drew
> New figures on its false and fragile glass
> As the old faded.

The failure of revolution alludes delicately to the celebrated Platonic image in "Adonais" of life as a "dome of many-coloured glass," staining and spoiling eternity. Revolution is too heaven-bound ever to succeed on earth.

All that is certainly wisdom, of a sort. But it is a wisdom known to Platonist and Christian alike. It is hardly in Godwin. It is a world away from that programme of instant political action where Shelley, less than a dozen years before, had once confidently begun his reckless race for truth. And considered as political wisdom, it is studiously neutral in its effects. Conservative and reformer alike it leaves without warrant for those intensities of conviction which, in youth, the poet had once felt to be the sole purpose and impulse of his life.

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PAUL PICKREL

# *Jude the Obscure* and the Fall of Phaethon

## I

Over the years I have accumulated considerable evidence that *Jude the Obscure* is a novel with some kind of special significance for male readers in later adolescence. The book has a way of becoming enmeshed with their experience such as few others have; they tend to find it painful, sometimes too painful, but that is part of the hold it has on them. Whatever is involved goes beyond a simple matter of identification; to be sure Jude is a young man and so are the readers I am speaking of, but young men are the central figures in many other novels that have no similar effect. Identification is involved, I think, but it must be identification of some rather special sort.

My own experience may be relevant. I first heard of the novel when I was a freshman in college. A teacher of mine, a man well into middle age, made some allusion to it (as we were reading something very different—Swift, I think), and almost against his will, it seemed, he was drawn into telling the whole story. I was so intensely involved by his relation that as soon as I could I got hold of a copy and somehow found time to get through it. Reading the book was a revelation, or rather it was two revelations. In the first place, the story my teacher had told us was not a very accurate account of *Jude*; I suspected then and over the years have in some measure confirmed that his memory had pulled the original narrative considerably closer to the events of his own life than it stood in Hardy's pages. The second revelation was that *Jude* really was the story of my life.

I was eighteen years old, with three shirts and one pair of pants, desperately trying to scramble into enough education to take me out of a little town and a national economic de-

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pression of unprecedented severity, and to open up some kind of future for myself, as Jude had tried to teach himself enough Latin and Greek to take him out of Marygreen to the university and a future more promising than any he could imagine if he stayed where he was. There were odd points of coincidence. I worked in the early mornings before classes in a bakery and Jude had delivered his old aunt's baked goods. As a little boy I had decided that I did not want to grow up because it was too scary to be an adult, and Jude was the only other boy I had ever come across, either in fact or in fiction, who felt the same way. Somewhere I had got the idea that there was some device or formula that would enable you to read Greek if you already knew some Latin, and Jude had thought the same. Later in his life Jude did some lettering in stone, and I had done some sign painting. And even now I discover that whenever I have not looked at the book for some years my mind has done to it what my teacher's had done earlier: dragged it a little nearer to my own experience than it actually is. I am still a bit surprised when I go back to it to discover how little of the story is taken up with the account of Jude's life before he leaves Marygreen. That is the section of the novel that is closest to my own experience and it expands in memory, as some later passages (mercifully) shrink.

Forty-seven years after I sat in that classroom where I first heard of *Jude*, and twelve hundred miles east of it, I found myself in another classroom where I had just finished lecturing on *Jude* to a large group of young women. Then the only young man in the class came up to speak to me. "Quite a book," he said, man-to-man. "I figure I've already had my Arabella. What I want to know is, where do I find my Sue?" Handsome, well-fed, the product of flawless dentistry and wearing the same pair of blue-jeans with their elegant holes in the knees day in and day out by choice, he was everything that I had not been in that other classroom long ago, as I had no doubt been different from my teacher a generation or more ahead of me. But dissimilar as his life had to be from mine (and mine from my teacher's) in almost every respect, he was nonetheless finding its story in *Jude*. Obviously a different story, yet still somehow there.

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## II

In the last fifteen years or so a considerable body of work has been carried out by psychologists that suggests some explanation of the way young men respond to this book. The work seems to have originated with Robert May, who summarizes and interprets his own and other researchers' results in a fascinating little book, *Sex and Fantasy* (1980). The fundamental psychological experiment involved is very simple and in its procedure far from new: it is what is called a Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)—a certain picture is shown to the experimental subjects and they are asked to write or tell the story it suggests to them. In this instance, the picture shows two trapeze performers, the man with his feet over a swinging bar, catching by her hands the woman who is not otherwise attached to anything at all. We look up at the brilliantly illuminated bodies from below, seeing them against the mostly dark top of the circus tent. We assume that there is an audience below; whether or not there are nets to catch falling bodies we cannot tell.

The picture has been shown to people of different sexes and different ages, different education, social class, sexual orientation, and so on; and the overwhelming evidence is that, beginning at age eight or nine and peaking at adolescence, the stories it suggests to males are as a group different from the stories that it suggests to females. The characteristic female example tells how the couple are going through a time of troubles—things are far from easy—but everything works out all right in the end. The typical male example tells how the couple start out brilliantly—it all looks fine—then things begin to go wrong and the end is defeat. Here are perhaps the purest examples May gives, the woman's story first:

> Husband and wife who've been given an opportunity in a first-class circus after many discouraging months in carnivals. She's discovered she's pregnant after having had several miscarriages. She's been warned not to indulge in strenuous physical activity. However, knowing that this would be an opportunity for her husband, she goes ahead without his knowledge. She feels joyous, being partner to his success, and suppresses thoughts of a possible miscarriage. They're a standing [outstanding?] success. They perform with discipline and artistry. She does not lose the child. (16)

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Here is a man's story:

> This is a husband and wife team flying through the air before a packed house. He has just caught her and they both feel a thrill of excitement. He met her as a young girl and fell in love with her and trained her to fly with him. He was very anxious for her at first but now he feels a sense of pride and relief. But too soon—in the next pass he reaches for her hands and misses. She falls to her death. He spends the rest of his life feeling guilty. He loses his confidence and his ability to fly. (17)

May identifies the male fantasy with the myth of Phaethon, a youth scoffed at by his friend for claiming to be the son of Phoebus Apollo. When Phaethon complains of the taunt to his mortal mother (the story goes) she sends him off for confirmation from the sun-god himself. At first his father is too brilliant; Phaethon has to hesitate at a distance to get used to the blinding light. But when he finally approaches, his father not only acknowledges paternity at once but in proof swears to grant the boy any one wish he may make. Phaethon of course wants to drive the chariot of the sun across the heavens for a single day. Apollo repents his hasty oath; he knows the task is beyond the youth's strength. But a promise is a promise, as Phaethon is not the last adolescent to point out when he wants to drive the family car just this once; he gets to drive the chariot but with disastrous results. He cannot hold the course; he comes too near the earth and seas dry up, deserts are created, mountains belch fire. Finally Jove himself has to stop the ruinous journey with a thunderbolt, and the adventure ends with Phaethon's long fall from the heavens.

The story recalls the myth of Icarus and other mighty falls. It recalls Erik Erikson's discovery that, while little girls playing with blocks like to create pleasant interior spaces and attractive entrances, little boys like (among other things) to pile up the blocks as high as they will go and then watch them fall down: "the contemplation of ruins is a masculine specialty." The masculine story may have its basis in the anatomy of the male or in his role in reproduction or in other aspects of male sexuality; it has its terrible analogue in the accounts of young men "totalling" automobiles in every evening newspaper.

Not all the stories are anything like as clear-cut in their differences as those quoted, of course. Homosexual males, not

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very surprisingly, tend to tell a story more like those told by women when they make the woman in the picture the central character but more like those told by men when they make the man the central character. Of four groups of women used as subjects in one elaborate series of experiments, a group of well-educated feminists told stories that conformed least to the feminine pattern, a group of skilled workers told stories that conformed most, and groups of nurses and undergraduate psychology students told stories that fell somewhere in between.

But there emerges from these studies a kind of composite portrait of the kind of male who can be counted on to tell the masculine version of the story in its purest form. I will call the type the Phaethon personality and try to piece together a picture of the men who share it from details scattered through May's book:

> . . . in awe of their fathers' aggression or competence and wish to show . . . that they can do as well . . . a period of isolation and estrangement from peers in the preadolescent and early adolescent years . . . a feeling of strain about gender . . . uncomfortable when not in control . . . a high need of achievement . . . an unrealistically high evaluation of [their] own abilities and chances of success . . . responding to stress by first locating an enemy out in the world and then proceeding to attack, and to be angry at, this enemy . . . particularly low in the tendency to turn blame inwards against the self . . . their most important emotional tie with an older man . . . an absent father [is] one source of their concern with lineage . . . often experiencing themselves as hemmed in and constrained against their will, and [in] constant danger [of] bursting out [in] unmodulated anger or assertion . . . [dominated by pride,] a cluster of attitudes and wishes that includes an inflated view of oneself, a touchy vulnerability to feelings of shame and inadequacy, a worship of will and will power, and a restless urge to achieve something outstanding . . . a striking absence of emotional bonds to others . . . fears of being reabsorbed into the 'ground' . . . awareness of death.

## III

Clearly *Jude the Obscure* tells a story of the same general type as the Phaethon myth: a youth of high amibition seeks to

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follow a noble course and fails. But it is even more to the point that the book is pervaded by the attitudes characteristic of what I have called the Phaethon personality. Some of these attitudes occur in Jude, others in Sue (this may make more sense of Hardy's assertion that they seem like two halves of the same person than anything else does), and some of the attitudes inform the book itself.

A good many of the parallels, though very important and central to the argument, are too obvious to be elaborated. There is, first of all, Jude's "need of achievement," his "restless urge to achieve something outstanding," which is the point of departure for the whole book. Whether this is accompanied by "an unrealistically high evaluation of [his] abilities" it is impossible to say, because the book never provides any practical test of what he can do intellectually; certainly the event proves that he has sadly overestimated his "chances of success." Then there is Jude's isolation from his peers, which seems to be almost complete. We hear of no playmate in childhood; at no time in his life does he have a friend of his own age and sex that the reader hears of. When he accompanies Arabella home after one of their first outings he is embarrassed to find her parents and some of their neighbors in the house; in a particularly inept phrase Hardy says that "they did not belong to his set or circle," but this is the only hint we ever have that Jude could claim membership in any social group, and the rather smart connotations of the word *set* are so absurdly inappropriate for a village loner like Jude that we can only conclude that the sentence is too careless to be taken seriously. Throughout his years of growing up Jude shows the "striking absence of emotional bonds to others" typical of the Phaethon personality; not only does he have no friends but the only relative he knows is the old great-aunt with whom he lives, and she makes no secret that he is a burden to her; she is anything but what is described in contemporary idiom as a warm and nurturing person. Jude's "most important emotional tie" in adolescence is "with an older man," the schoolmaster Phillotson, and that tie exists almost wholly in fantasy, since Phillotson left Marygreen when Jude was a small boy.

One of the less obvious attitudes shared by the novel and

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the Phaethon personality is the concern with being in control, a concern that mainly manifests itself in the novel in the almost compulsive patterning of characters and events. The main characters, for instance, consist of two pairs, one male, the other female, with each pair carefully balanced against the other and carefully constrasted within itself. Each of the male characters has a wise old counselor who emerges from his past as needed; they are not very surprisingly of different sexes, like the old woman and the old man who bob out of a mechanical clock; the Widow Edlin appears when Jude needs her and Gillingham does the same for Phillotson. Physician Vilbert, the quack doctor who is a survivor of the timeless folk past, an old man at the beginning of the book but young enough to become Arabella's third husband at the end, balances Little Father Time, the prematurely aged prophet of the urban future, who ends a wizened child suicide. The characters move back and forth in obedience to the laws of permutation and combination as predictably as the dancers in a country dance balance to their partners at the caller's command.

Hardy himself was aware of this aspect of the book. He said that "the rectangular lines of the story were not premeditated, but came by chance: except, of course, that the involutions of four lives must necessarily be a sort of quadrille." The logic of this last is not impeccable; four is almost the standard number of central characters in the English novel—writers as dissimilar as Jane Austen, George Eliot, and D. H. Lawrence have started out with two young women and their suitors without necessarily ending up with "a sort of quadrille."

Symmetrical grouping of characters and events is only one of the methods of patterning in *Jude*; another is recurrence, a feature of the narration almost ubiquitous. If Jude takes a train with Sue you can bet that it will be the very train he took a little earlier with Arabella; if they go to a hotel on arrival you can bet that it will be the same hotel he stayed at a little earlier with Arabella; and when they are shown to their room it will be the very room. The first time Jude "walks out" with Arabella they stop at a country pub for refreshment and sit under a representation of Samson and Delilah; some years

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later when he is engaged in a very different sort of outing with Sue they find themselves in that pub again and sitting under that very picture; near the end when Arabella looks upon Jude sick in bed she thinks of him as "her shorn Samson." Apparently Jude never enters or leaves Marygreen without walking past the Brown House, and the reader is told about it every single time it happens.

These repetitions have different effects for different readers, or more than one effect for the same reader at different times or even simultaneously. For instance: since the Brown House has some connection with a sad sexual episode in his family's past, repeated mention of it can build up in Jude (and perhaps in the reader) a cumulative sense of menace, or it can strike the reader as a rather gratuitous attempt at portentousness. Some of the recurrences are undoubtedly moving: near the end of the novel, when Arabella has got Jude drunk so that he will marry her again, he thinks as she helps him stumble up the stairs of a Christminster slum that they are back on the stairs of the farm cottage where she first found him a willing victim of seduction. Here the recurrence has its significance within a character's mind—it is not a piece of narrative appliqué like the coincidence of going to the same hotel with a different woman—and that has a good deal to do with its ability to move us even after many readings.

But the main thing to see is that all this patterning is in service of a view of experience as essentially random. Life in the vision of it that *Jude the Obscure* gives us is deeply, incurably asymmetrical: there is no symmetry between ambition and attainment, between desire and fulfillment; "the scorn of Nature for man's finer emotions, and her lack of interest in his aspirations" can only mean that life in the world must be a hopelessly mismatched sort of enterprise, yet that vision is embodied in a story tirelessly symmetrical in construction. There is an argument to be made that this discrepancy between the telling and the tale is a source of irony, but it may be more to present purposes to wonder, particularly in view of Hardy's testimony that the "rectangularity" of the novel was unintentional, if the symmetries of the book are not an unconscious strategy for keeping at bay the essential chaos of the story, for distancing and reducing the threat of the disintegration it records.

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The very prose of the novel shows an effort to keep the narrative under control. Hardy is fond of a certain group of words—a sub-group of what linguists call *deictics* ('pointers')—and uses them repeatedly: "the grim controversy *above* given," "the racing gents *aforesaid*," "their . . . second attempt *thereat*." It is as if events in the novel might get out of hand, become a jumbled mess, if they were not heavily policed by a cluster of the most charmless words in the English language. Often the words are quite unnecessary to the sense; sometimes much less cumbersome and obtrusive deictics could be substituted. It is not unlikely that Hardy found some kind of grim humor in a phrase like "the racing gents aforesaid," but that consideration would not reduce its constabulary power.

A minor but curious way in which the need for control enters the book is its interest in models. Early in the story Jude and Sue meet by chance at a model of the city of Jerusalem that is being exhibited to the public; later they join in constructing a model of one of the Christminster colleges; still later, after Jude's health begins to fail, they travel around the country baking and selling "Christminster cakes"—models in pastry of bits of tracery such as would be found in medieval buildings. None of these models is very central to the story, or at least something else could be easily substituted, and the model of a Christminster college that Jude and Sue make is mentioned in a most perfunctory way. The interest in models seems to answer some psychological need rather than a narrative purpose. The impulse to miniaturize the world is doubtless complex, but a powerful strain in it must be the need to keep things under control, to make the world small enough to be manipulated.

Concern with control merges with another characteristic central to the Phaethon personality: "a feeling of strain about gender." Of the main characters Sue is the one who feels most uncomfortable with her sexuality, and basic to her discomfort is her fear of losing control, with its concomitant desire to exercise control over others. (Her "little thumb" is a memorable feature of the descriptions of Sue's appearance, perhaps because she likes to keep people under it.) For all her femininity she wants men to treat her as if she were a man herself. As a child she has been a tomboy, and before she meets Jude she has lived with a Christminster student as

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if they were two young men, until he died of what seems like a symbolic consumption; and she imposes the same uncongenial regimen on Jude until their relationship is threatened by Arabella's reappearance; then she at last agrees to sexual consummation as the price of maintaining control.

Sue's sexual ideal is to "ennoble some man to high aims," an ideal that recalls Hedda Gabler: "I want for once in my life to have power to mold a human destiny." And the similarity between the two heroines may not be entirely accidental. Hardy had seen the play in London in the translation of his friends William Archer and Edmund Gosse in 1891, four years before *Jude* was published, and there are other similarities between it and his novel: both Sue and Hedda are seen as characteristically modern, each is constrasted with another woman of more straightforward sexuality, each lives or has lived on the fringes of a scholarly society. Hedda's need to be in charge is so overwhelming that it leads to suicide, the ultimate assertion of control over one's life, and Sue's return to traditional belief and her legal husband's bed at the end of *Jude* is presented as something like a spiritual suicide. (Whether there can be any influence of Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* on the figure of Little Father Time in *Jude* is more of a question. The play had not been produced or published in England when the novel appeared, but Hardy could have heard of it from Archer or Gosse or read accounts of the Continental productions. The parallel is very general—a strange little boy who seems to come from another world by his death profoundly changes his parents' lives—but it *is* a parallel. To a degree unmatched by any other Hardy novel, *Jude* has a temperamental affinity with northern Expressionism; Edvard Munch would have been its perfect illustrator.)

The most sexually ambiguous episode in the book occurs when Sue comes to Jude's room dripping wet, having waded through "the biggest river in the county" to escape the teachers' college she has been attending. He makes her take off her wet clothes and put on his Sunday suit; they spend a chaste night together both dressed as men and convincing enough in their disguise to fool the landlady. The episode is central to the book beyond its considerable importance in advancing the story (after it Sue cannot go back to the college

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and in desperation marries Phillotson): for one thing it is a rather wonderful realization in narrative terms of the kind of psychological pressure Sue is under; for another it is almost certainly the happiest night they ever spend together. Hardy's delight in the scene comes out in some of his best writing in a book that has plenty of his worst:

> About six o'clock he awoke completely, and lighting a candle, found that her clothes were dry. Her chair being a far more comfortable one than his she still slept on inside his great-coat, looking warm as a new bun and boyish as a Ganymedes. Placing the garments by her and touching her on the shoulder he went downstairs, and washed himself by starlight in the yard.

The classical allusion next to the homely comparison to a new bun (Jude had not worked in a bakery without effect) achieves the rough complexity of Hardy at his best; the final phrase places the most ordinary of human activities in a vast and starry space.

The episode where she spends the night in Jude's room is the only one where Sue is described as boyish in appearance, but once Jude tells her that she does not talk like a girl. Such details, taken with her wish to be treated like a male companion, are enough to give her relationship with Jude a slight hint of homosexuality, as it already has a slight hint of incest: they are first cousins, with a remarkable physical resemblance and intellectual kinship. These two forms of forbidden sex, often (one suspects) metaphors of one another, at least in literature, have in common a refusal to surrender to the wholly other, a clinging to control through a preference for a sexual partner in some measure already known because like oneself.

Fear of loss of control manifests itself in still another characteristic of the Phaethon personality: the sense of the self as hemmed in and constrained against its will, with the accompanying danger of bursting out in unmodulated anger or assertion. Jude's occasional bouts of drinking are the chief examples of "bursting out" in the book, but his worry about his drinking is disproportionate to the amount of drinking that he actually does, which seems to be not much. No great subtlety is required to guess that his worry masks his fear of his own aggression. The great scene where he gets drunk and re-

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cites the Latin Creed to a bunch of roughs in a Christminster pub shows aggression on several fronts: against the crowd, too stupid even to know what he is reciting; against the actual recitation, which is all he has to show for his years of study of the ancient languages; against himself, that he has come to this. The terrible humiliation he undergoes in that scene is the obverse of the pride that dominates the Phaethon personality. Near the end of his life, when he still cannot stay away from Christminster, he returns on Remembrance Day, but he says that for him it is Humiliation Day. Inverted pride again.

No attitude is more fundamental to both *Jude the Obscure* and the Phaethon personality than the need to externalize blame, to find an enemy out there in the world to hold responsible for one's failures rather than turning blame inward against the self. Early in the novel, when Jude is so abruptly drawn away from his classical studies by his attraction to Arabella, he has no responsibility for his action: he is only responding to "orders from headquarters"—it is "as if materially, a compelling arm of extraordinary muscular power seized hold of him." Some years and many chapters later, after the children are dead, Sue says, "There is something external to us which says, 'You shan't!' First it said, 'You shan't learn!' Then it said, 'You shan't labour!' Now it says, 'You shan't love!' "

There is a problem in locating the antecedent of Sue's "it"—not because there are no candidates, but because there are too many. Presumably the headquarters from which Jude receives such peremptory orders belong to Nature, and hers too must be the powerful muscular arm that reaches out to seize him. In fact Nature, at least when she wears the face of nineteenth-century biology, is at best indifferent and often malevolent ("O why should Nature's law be mutual butchery!" Sue cries); of that other and kindlier Nature of woods and fields and heath that figures in novels Hardy wrote earlier only a very occasional detail appears in *Jude*. And in this book Nature goes beyond her general hostility to mark Jude (and Sue too, since she is his cousin) with a special family taint: "The Fawleys were not made for wedlock," the old aunt tells him, "it never seemed to sit well on us. There's sommat in our blood that won't take kindly to the notion of being bound to do what we do readily enough if not bound."

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On the other hand, the something that says "you shan't" often seems to be "the *artificial* system of things," society as it is constituted at a particular time and place, especially the institution of marriage and the lack of access for poor students to the ancient universities in late nineteenth-century England. Hardy himself seems to have taken this aspect of the book very seriously; in the postscript that he added to his original Preface seventeen years after the book was first published he proudly observes that some people thought the college for working men recently established at Oxford should have been called the College of Jude the Obscure. Both Jude and Sue tend to see themselves as caught up in a tragedy of the historical moment, especially Sue: "When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say!" she wonders.

With all this causation available anyone would suppose that events in the novel would be richly overdetermined, but in fact Hardy can be remarkably vague and even silent about what causes specific events. One episode pivotal to the story, with repercussions throughout the rest of the book, is the missing of the train by Jude and Sue. But when we ask whether it is caused by Nature or society, or perhaps by a taint of train-missing that runs in the Fawley blood, we realize that the text gives no reason for it whatever. The characteristic mode of wisdom in *Jude* is tautology laced with truism. Arabella deals with her existential anguish with remarks like "Married is married" and "Poor folks must live"; the Widow Edlin shrewdly observes, "The truth's the truth"; with three children newly dead Jude reaches to Aeschylus to quote, "Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined end." So far as anything the text tells us goes, Sue and Jude miss the train because they miss the train.

Even when causes are alleged they do not always bear close examination. For many chapters we see Jude as the victim of harsh marriage laws; then Arabella wants a divorce, and it suddenly becomes remarkably easy to get one, as Jude himself observes, and even the cost is less than ruinous. The marriage laws can have little to do with the unhappiness of Jude's life with Sue, since they are never married; popular prejudice against the way they live has something to do with it, but far

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less than Sue's own sexual nature, which can hardly be described as something outside herself or the consequence of the marriage institution. We are moved that Jude can enter a Christminster college only as a stonemason repairing the physical fabric, but there is no evidence that he ever applies for academic admission—no evidence, in fact, that he ever finds out exactly how application is made. He is really a terrible blunderer. It is a consideration at most peripheral, but the friend from whose career Hardy took many hints for Jude's, a man named Horace Moule, was admitted not only to Oxford but to Cambridge too, though he took a degree neither place.

In causation as in all things Hardy dwells in contradiction undismayed. On one page Jude is "predestinate"; on another, when he thinks the anthem sung in the great cathedral-church of Christminster has some special message for him, Hardy points out that no destiny is involved; it is just the text always sung on that particular Sunday. Even on the rare occasion when Hardy seems to internalize blame, as when he finds Jude guilty of "the modern vice of restlessness," he is curiously offsides, for Jude is in almost every respect a remarkably unmodern youth. The kind of education and career he wants are wholly traditional, like his stopgap job as stonemason. He is shocked by Sue's modernity, and gives as his reason for not trying his luck in London that his trade is carried on there in a newfangled way. Of course he changes, but always by way of surrendering the past, never really embracing the new: he is "an outsider to the end of [his] days."

Often it seems that Hardy is trying to tell a modern story in an outdated framework: the sensibility is wonderfully alive but the machinery creaks. At the bottom of our little Freudian hearts we know that Jude and Sue miss the train because they really do not want to catch it, and it may be a strength of the story that it leaves space for our own reading of events, as it certainly makes it easier for us to identify with the characters.

Concern with lineage and the absent father is a final characteristic of the Phaethon personality to be considered in the context of *Jude the Obscure*. At first glance fathers seem to be not only absent but inconsequential in the book: Sue is estranged from her father and very rarely speaks of him; Jude

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has lost his father before the story begins and he never seems to think of him. But it is hardly fanciful to see Jude's whole intense longing after Christminster as arising from a need to find and be acknowledged by and be reconciled to the father. Though less forthrightly than Phaethon, Jude too claims divine paternity. When he first hears of Christminster he thinks it must be the City of God, "the heavenly Jerusalem"; he thinks that he will go there and become "her beloved son, in whom she shall be well pleased." This is only one, though perhaps the most striking, of the places where Jude appropriates to himself language the New Testament uses of Christ. Sometimes the identification is more modest ("what a poor Christ he made," Jude thinks at one point), but not always. Even the substitution of the name Christminster for Oxford may be significant. Doubtless it is fortuitous but possibly it is interesting that Jude first experiences Christminster as a glow of light in the distance, as Phaethon first experiences his divine father.

The biological lineage that Jude and Sue share is augmented by a series of classical and Biblical parallels that gives them a grandeur of descent that no mere Fawley blood, for all its hereditary taint, could possibly provide. Jude is not only a shorn Samson and a poor Christ: when Sue hears some dreadful episode from the history of their common ancestry she says that they are like the house of Atreus, and Jude adds: or like the house of Jeroboam. Such repeated affiliation of the characters with the greatest names in myth and history gives us a double image of them, as perhaps we have of ourselves; simultaneously we see them as pathetically small, undestined, alone, and as large, as part of a pattern, with something symbolic about them.

Hardy is master of the halo effect. He may not tell us what triggers a particular happening (he may not be able to), but he conveys a sense of vast forces moving ominously in the background, enlarging the significance of events even when failing to explain them. So too he can make us see a figure like poor Jude, with all his Wessex particularity upon him, yet ringed with light from out the human past. Of course fiction is neither physics nor psychology; what passes for cause or motive must often be less operative than evaluative.

But in the end Jude has to recognize that he is being reab-

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sorbed into the 'ground', as the Phaethon personality fears to be. He has entered Christminster as a physical place again and again without ever touching it as a spiritual capital, let alone becoming its "beloved son." For all his struggle he has not escaped the anonymity of the village poor whence he comes; he has no divine father; he is mortal after all.

## IV

One source of *Jude*'s appeal for the male reader in later adolescence has no parallel in the Phaethon story; it is the powerful presentation, in the figures of Sue and Arabella, of the *Venus duplex*, the twofold Venus, which runs through much of the presentation of woman in Western art. It is in late adolescence that the two sexes are most unlike, when the mystery of the other is greatest, both as threat and promise, and the *Venus duplex* encapsulates the doubleness of the young male's vision of his opposite.

The phrase has been given currency by the art historian Erwin Panofsky; he wrote eloquently of its manifestations in Renaissance art, above all in the great Titian picture usually called *Sacred and Profane Love*. A painting very wide in respect to its height, it has at the center the stone fountain of love, with Love himself, a little naked boy, playing with his fingers in the pure water; the stone face of the fountain bears in bas-relief the representation of (among other things) an unbridled horse, symbol of unbridled passion. On each end of the fountain (it is shaped something like an old-fashioned watering trough for animals) sits a beautiful woman, each emblematic of one way the horse of passion can be bridled. The woman on the left is magnificently dressed and coifed, posed against a fortified castle that stands in a field full of symbols of the good life in this world: she is Profane Love. At the other end, on the viewer's right, posed so that she seems to be higher than her companion, sits Sacred Love; she is nude save for a splendid cloak, and behind her stands a church and a body of water, perhaps symbolic of baptism.

It is a work of unsurpassed beauty, but it is only a supreme expression of a kind of contrast we find everywhere, in wide-

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ly varying idioms, from representations of Eve and Mary to Picasso's *Girl before a Mirror.* The double image of woman runs through the English novel: Sophia Western and Molly Seagrim, Rebecca and Rowena, Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley, Ursula and Gudrum Brangwen; in many a Western movie it appears in the contrast between the prim schoolmistress and the sultry dance-hall queen—Grace Kelly and Katie Jurado in *High Noon*, for instance.

Hardy's treatment of the subject is striking both for the harshness of the contrast between his two female characters and for the marked bias he exhibits in presenting each of them. It hardly simplifies his scheme to say that Sue is woman as spirit and Arabella is woman as flesh, and it is no injustice to his treatment to say that he systematically ameliorates Sue's character just as he systematically denigrates Arabella's.

One thing that is wrong with Arabella's flesh is that there is too much of it, as other characters, as well as the author, do not hesitate to point out, even to her. She and Jude have been married only a few weeks when he observes that her false dimples are unbecoming to a married woman "of full-sized figure like you." When she meets her old schoolteacher Phillotson he fails to recognize her, observing that it would be hard to see in her "present portly self the slim school child" she must once have been. When she jumps out of bed "the soft parts of her person" shake; when she sings her voice (not unnaturally) rises and falls, "her inflated bosom being also seen doing likewise." Notice the word *inflated* in this awkward phrase; it can hardly mean more than that she is breathing deeply enough to produce a musical tone, as anyone must in singing, yet somehow it seems to count against her; clearly you would never catch Sue inflating *her* bosom—"the small, tight convexities of her bodice, so different from Arabella's amplitudes." Although the three main characters must be of nearly the same age, Arabella ages far more rapidly than the others; she is a middle-aged woman when Sue is still a girl: "a fleshy, coarse woman," in Sue's description, and Hardy calls her (no more generously) "a woman of rank passions," hinting that she resorts to prostitution to earn the money with which she buys Jude the drinks that lead to their remarriage.

Sue, on the other hand, is "a fay, or sprite—not a woman

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. . . phantasmal, bodiless . . . uncarnate . . . [free] from everything that's gross . . . most ethereal, least sensual without sexlessness."

The reader need not have read D. H. Lawrence on the subject to balk at accepting every word that is said in Arabella's disparagement. She twice maneuvers Jude into marrying her without ever seeming as manipulative as Sue, because she acts out of powerful feelings whereas Sue is a dabbler, "an epicure of emotions." When Arabella speaks she sounds like a woman talking, as Sue so often does not; her conversational range is limited but at least she never quotes J. S. Mill. Her feeling for Jude may have to be crudely trimmed to fit her narrow circumstances, but it is real enough. In the brief religious phase she goes through after her second husband's death she speaks out: "After all that's said about the comforts of this religion, I wish I had Jude back again!" When Sue looks at Arabella she sees only a coarse exterior, but when Arabella looks at Sue she sees the woman beneath the skin: "not a particular warm-hearted creature . . . , though she cares for him . . . as much as she's able to . . . not much to depend on, though; a slim, fidgety little thing like that . . . don't know what love is—at least what I call love!" Her guesses about the sexual relations between Jude and Sue are equally accurate.

There is a striking disparity between the Sue Hardy wants us to see and the Sue we in fact see, and he seems to have been to some extent aware of the problem. The text of *Jude* that we usually read contains many small revisions that he introduced when he prepared the book for a new edition in 1903, eight years after the original book publication, and the most significant group of revisions has the cumulative effect of making Sue more appealing. But problems remain. Consider this passage, where Sue is planning how she will punish Jude for having kissed her (at the time she is married to Phillotson):

> ". . . And I won't write to him any more, or at least for a long time, to impress him with my dignity! And I hope it will hurt him very much—expecting a letter to-morrow morning, and the next, and the next, and no letter coming. He'll suffer then with suspense—won't he, that's all!—and I am very glad of it!"—Tears of

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> pity for Jude's approaching sufferings at her hands mingled with those which had surged up in pity for herself.
>
> Then the slim little wife of a husband whose person was disagreeable to her, the ethereal, fine-nerved, sensitive girl, quite unfitted by temperament and instinct to fulfill the conditions of the matrimonial relation with Phillotson, possibly with scarce any man, walked fitfully along, and panted, and brought weariness into her eyes by gazing and worrying hopelessly.

We hardly know which is the true Sue, the "slim little wife . . . , the ethereal, fine-nerved, sensitive girl" whom Hardy describes or the young woman hoping to hurt Jude and to make him suffer who reveals herself in speech.

At the very end of the book Sue and Arabella break out of the characterizations in which Hardy has tried to confine them and in some measure become the other selves that the reader has long suspected they were capable of becoming. For most of the story Sue's ego, for instance, seems innocent or at worst problematic; it expresses itself in her flirtatiousness, her need for tribute, her desire for power over others. But in the end her ego reveals itself as simply monstrous: she sees the death of her children as the instrument of her salvation; she is glad of the event (or says she is) because it blots out her life with Jude. As for his view of her, he finally confesses to himself that to save her own soul she has let his "go damn," but adds (still externalizing blame), "But it isn't her fault, poor little girl—I am sure it isn't!" At their last terrible interview he finally tells her that she is not worth a man's love—and begs her to run away with him, a dying man. After that we hear that she quickly ages ("years and years," according to the Widow Edlin) and the last account is of her puttering incompetently around Phillotson's kitchen.

By contrast, we last see Arabella standing foursquare beside the dead Jude, speaking the final words of the novel. To be sure literary necessity has something to do with her place there, since nobody else is left for the job. But we do not feel that she is stepping out of character; she speaks with dignity and respect of the powerful feelings that have dominated the lives we have seen unfolded and that will go on dominating them while life lasts, feelings (Hardy seems at last to be acknowledging) that she, for all her faults, has done less to trivialize than Sue.

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So in the end the bias Hardy has shown toward his female characters merges with that general ambivalence with which he sees everything. Typically he tells of a land too long lived in: "Every inch of ground had been the site, first or last, of energy, gaiety, horse-play, bickerings, weariness." The very sentence that describes the outworn landscape exhausts itself in reaching its conclusion. Yet the future can hardly be better. The doctor called in when the children die says that there are many boys like Little Father Time springing up these days: "They seem to see all [life's] terrors before they are old enough to have the staying power to resist." Hardy captures the adolescent feeling of having to take on the world at a particularly bad moment in its history, of being thrust too early upon a scene too nearly played out. The ambivalence of his stance before the story he tells finds as sympathetic a response in the adolescent reader as the story itself does.

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# Milosz and the Moral Authority of Poetry

What authority does poetry have in the present age? Czesław Milosz often poses this question in his essays on literature and poetics, history and philosophy. He sees humankind threatened by proliferating universals, the necessities of scientific and social theory which seem to negate the integrity of the individual, as they usurp the claims of poetry to truth. Thus as a theoretician he is attracted to metaphysical systems like those of the Russian philosopher Lev Shestov and the French philosopher Simone Weil, which pose the human soul as a radical particular allied to a transcendent good in opposition to social and natural necessity. He can then ground his practical concerns as a poet in a kind of poetic nominalism. The authority of poetry stems from its courageous witness that necessity does not engulf us; poetry is the voice of the individual free to pursue the good, which in fact establishes the good by speaking.

Milosz was raised in the forests of Lithuania, began his studies in the provincial capital of Wilno, and moved to Warsaw, where he spent the war years as a member of the Polish Underground formed in resistance to the German occupation. He survived the Warsaw Uprising (in which the Red Army waited and watched the Polish resistance destroy itself in futile combat with the Germans before entering the city), was caught up by the Russian takeover of postwar Poland and defected to the West five years later. After a decade in Paris as an itinerant man of letters, he accepted a professorship at Berkeley, where he has remained since, an emigré and exile.

Some poets in the United States have regarded Milosz with a strange mixture of admiration and jealousy. They blame the peripheral status of poetry in this country on the surface calm, the decadent affluence and tolerance of a society where

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all values are relative. Anyone can say anything, and no one pays much attention. By contrast, Milosz was privileged to live in the midst of great events, war, the collapse of civilizations, repressive occupation, in which writing a poem could be an heroic gesture, a genuinely moral act, the expression of objective value. In such situations, when poetry claims the authority of truth, it can become as necessary to the populace as bread, and the romantic-modernist isolation of the poet is abolished.

Milosz cannot be blamed for this naive assessment of his example by people who have never suffered the disruption of the entire fabric of their society. His ironic and hopeful account of the relation of poetry to our moral and political interests belies such naiveté. Yet his animosity towards the universal is so intense, and his insistence on the particular and transcendent so radical, that his advice to us is less useful than it might be.

In this essay, I would like to engage Milosz's moralizing poetics with my own alternative account, which relates poetry to the social, everyday activity of moral deliberation and makes it easier to see the possible authority of poetry in ordinary as well as cataclysmic situations. Though I will make reference to a number of his books, I will concentrate on his Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, *The Witness of Poetry*, a full-dress statement of his poetics published by Harvard University Press in 1983, and to some of his poems available in English translation in his revised *Selected Poems* (The Ecco Press, 1980).

Briefly, I agree with Milosz that "scientific" social theories which pretend to reduce particular cases to necessary universal principles endanger our moral education and impugn the status of poetry. But I see our best recourse against the tyranny of necessity not in the radically particular and transcendent, but in social discourse and the spirited embodiments of everyday life. Poetry can be authoritative to the extent that it helps us discover the good. But discovery of the good is an unending social process of deliberation about values, which are always, in the phrase of W. B. Gallie, essentially contestable. The very meaning and import of values are worked out in the offensives and defenses which modulate and regulate each other in practical deliberation. As we deliberate about

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what to do, we are constructing social reality. We are also involved in a process which continually adjusts universal principles to particular cases, without the domination or disappearance of either. When poetry in the United States fails, its inadequacy is then best understood as a failure of eloquence and phronesis, prudential wisdom. Nonetheless, poetry can play an important role in moral deliberation, and in what follows I will examine this role more closely.

## I

In *The Captive Mind*, a book written shortly after his departure from Poland, Milosz discusses the effect of the Russian-controlled Marxist regime on Polish writers of his acquaintance. "Alpha the Moralist" was a haughty, austere personality who admired purity and wished to be recognized as a moral authority. He tended to write novels of ideas, insufficiently rooted in experience and observation of life. In underground Warsaw, his writings on the ethic of loyalty and self-sacrifice inspired many of the young people who were to be among the two hundred thousand slaughtered in the Warsaw Uprising. Milosz relates that Alpha's first postwar novel contained over-simplifications at odds with his richly ambiguous experiences in the war. The Communist regime imprisoned large numbers of resistance fighters who had been allied with the London government-in-exile; although they had been fighting Hitler, they were now called class enemies. (Precisely the same fate awaited Communist resistance fighters in Greece.) Yet Alpha depicted them in his novel merely as lost souls, incapable of hearing the good news offered by the protagonist, a fearless old Communist.

"Beta the disappointed lover of humanity" made his literary career in postwar Poland by writing a chilling account of his experience as an "upper caste" prisoner in Auschwitz. (The Party welcomed all anti-Nazi literature at the time.) He described how the less clever and aggressive perished, while he managed to keep himself warm and well-fed. Life in the camp appears as Hobbes's state of nature, each individual pitted against all the others, without sympathy or conscience,

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stripped of the illusory habits of civilization. And yet, Milosz points out, fellow-inmates who knew Beta in Auschwitz say that he often acted with courage and compassion. The extreme brutality of his stories disguised his principle of selection.

Milosz accuses Alpha and Beta of failing both as artists and as moralists. Indeed, the two kinds of failure cannot be disentangled. Because they didn't capture the depth and complexity (the moral *reality*) of the characters, their work is morally unedifying and also bad art. They have reduced their characters to angels, demons or animals. We have nothing to learn from such types, which are intrinsically good, incorrigible or simply amoral and so incapable of enlightenment or degeneration. They cannot be used to think through the meaning of moral principles brought to bear on difficult situations. Neither do they compel our attention or compassion; as works of art, they are inert. We are not tempted to inject ourselves imaginatively into these adventures, rounding out the story in reflective hindsight: What if she had acted otherwise? What would I have done in that situation? If only . . . No genuine moral tension calls us back into the story; we simply do not care enough to return to it. Our evaluation of an author's display of moral imagination is at once an aesthetic and an ethical judgment.

The long terrible silences of the war incited a whole generation of postwar Polish writers, Milosz among them, to give expression to what they and others had experienced. Dialectical materialism was a theodicy which provided rationalization a priori: the enemy (the exponents of capitalism in its most virulent form, fascism) deserved to die, and the innocent . . . Well, they could die with the satisfaction of knowing this conflagration was needed to clear the way for the Communist millennium. Shestov, if he had lived to hear the pronouncements, would have repudiated Marxist necessity as he repudiated the whole philosophic tradition springing from Greek metaphysics for which, he complained, only the necessary and general were important. But why should we respect a necessity that has no respect for us, radical particulars, and in fact violates our intensest desires? We must not accept even one tear shed by one innocent child; reason masks the absur-

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dity of existence; suffering is the key to truth. In his collection of essays, *Emperor of the Earth* (U. of California Press, 1981), Milosz devotes a whole chapter to expounding Shestov's refusal.

Yet even Milosz must find it difficult to make sense of Shestov's rebellion against not only mathematical and natural necessity, but historical necessity as well. Shestov demands of God that He unmake history. We cannot accept, for example, that Socrates died at the hands of the Athenians. But with this demand, the self, the radical particular, also demands to be itself unmade. We are what we are because of our origin in a certain cultural geography, a moment in history, with all its injustice and suffering. Shestov tries to extract the self from the determinations of historical necessity, but in so doing he empties it of content.

Is there then no middle ground between the necessity of the Marxist and Shestov's radical but empty voluntarism? Are we condemned to complacent rationalization or impotent and uncomprehending rage? A middle ground does exist; it is the place where we deliberate about the past, where poets compose poems about the past as part of that process. Aristotle said we only deliberate about the future, but there he was mistaken. We are continually engaged in constructing the moral truth of the past as well as of the present. The reality of the past is in part how it influences us now; as we deliberate about it, our characterization of it changes, and it acts on us differently. What can a poet do for the past? Engage the dead in conversation; mourn; forgive. Like all deliberation, this is a long and difficult process, with no certain outcome.

How lucky Milosz is, the American poets say, to have the experience of such great suffering, which yields such depths of moral insight. What Milosz recounts, however, about the witness of poetry in reaction to war and genocide does not bear out this foolish romanticism, akin to the myth that the best poets are madmen. The human conversation itself suffers when society breaks down, and with it our moral discriminations and our poetry; often the damage can hardly be repaired.

In Chapter 5 of *The Witness of Poetry*, Milosz makes clear that cataclysms provide neither necessary nor sufficient condi-

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tions for profound moralizing or great art. During the war years, poetry was the main genre of underground literature, since a poem could be contained on a single page. A recently published anthology of such work, called *Poetry of Fighting Poland*, contained almost two thousand pages of poems and songs. But most of them, he concludes, do not have much aesthetic worth: only a few show much familiarity with poetic craft; most were too blatant in their calls to battle. In general, they were filled with moral and aesthetic commonplaces. And this is not surprising, since "people thrown into the middle of events that tear cries of pain from their mouths have difficulty in finding the distance necessary to transform this material artistically." War presents the least favorable conditions for prudence, the ability to see an issue from all angles, in all its ambiguity. It is unlikely that a soldier or prisoner will consider the lofty ideals, the stupidity, pain and grief of the enemy firing at him.

If the trauma to social life has been thorough enough, even the cessation of hostilities will not restore the conversation. Milosz reviews the work of a half-dozen postwar Polish poets and finds them all to one degree or another misologic, hostile to and distrustful of the word. They reproached culture with being a tissue of illusion, "a network of meanings and symbols as a façade to hide the genocide underway," and were therefore attracted to various forms of reductionism. Their imagery tends to assimilate people to animals and physical objects, action to motion, human relations to the push-pull of forces. Their diction and vocabulary is simple and even slightly decomposed; they eschew obvious figures, stripping their poems of "eloquence."

I find such poetry both crippled and moving, half in retreat from discourse and half engaged; its expressiveness belies its distrust of expression. True despair is silent; these utterances of despair are hopeful insofar as they are uttered. Yet their moral usefulness is impaired, for the retreat from discourse which they represent is the source of the suffering they protest, not its solution. Eloquence can certainly be abused. But moral wisdom must be eloquent, for it must be effective, and virtue is worked out in social discourse. We must be able to persuade others about their own interests in

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order to get anything done. The cure for the abuse of eloquence is more eloquence, more efficacious wisdom.

Milosz quotes two poems, the first by Zbigniew Herbert, the second by Aleksandor Wat, in which the writers take stones as being worthy of emulation. The duplicity of the message is revealed by the fact that both poets provide their stones with eyes:

> Pebbles cannot be tamed
> to the end they will look at us
> with a calm and very clear eye.
>
> ***
>
> . . . With the eyes of a stone, myself
> a stone among stones, and like them sensitive,
> pulsating to the turning of the sun.

On the one hand, this conceit is morally unhelpful; the fixity and silence of stones is simply unattainable for human beings (though not for corpses). On the other hand, neither poet can resist anthropomorphizing the stones, investing them with the virtues of self-possession, nobility, honesty and sensitivity. But virtue is social, and is created by people who talk about themselves and each other.

Even Milosz sometimes seems infected by such misology, when, for example, he wishes for fixed and 'objective' values, like those removed, disembodied monoliths, the forms of Plato; or when he excuses the reductions of the foregoing poets as a kind of realism. Yet Milosz himself managed to write poems about his ruined country which are eloquent and mournful, and which address both the dead and the living. Those silenced by catastrophe really do need us to speak for them, to forgive them; sometimes poetry is equal to the demand. "Dedication" was written in Warsaw in 1945.

> You whom I could not save
> Listen to me.
> Try to understand this simple speech as I would be
> ashamed of another.
> I swear, there is in me no wizardry of word.
> I speak to you with silence like a cloud or a tree.

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What strengthened me, for you was lethal.
You mixed up farewell to an epoch with the
beginning of a new one,
Inspiration of hatred with lyrical beauty,
Blind force into accomplished shape.

Here is the valley of shallow Polish rivers. And an
immense bridge
Going into white fog. Here is a broken city,
And the mind throws the screams of gulls on your grave
When I am talking with you.

What is poetry which does not save
Nations or people?
A connivance with official lies,
A song of drunkards whose throats will be cut in a moment,
Readings for sophomore girls.
That I wanted good poetry without knowing it,
That I discovered, late, its salutary aim,
In this and only this I find salvation.

They used to pour millet on graves or poppy seeds
To feed the dead who would come disguised as birds.
I put this book here for you, who once lived
So that you should visit us no more.

Only in the first stanza does Milosz resort to the reductive commonplaces of his generation, and its curious inversion of the pathetic fallacy. "I speak to you with silence like a cloud or a tree." Admittedly, there is something paradoxical about the way in which elegiac poems address the dead person directly. Yet we often have unfinished business with the dead, and thus they enter into our deliberations; we talk to them so they will not haunt us into repetitions of revenge or grief. For they both are and are not beyond salvation.

"Dedication," like all successful deliberating, exhibits a delicate enmeshment of universal and particular. It begins with a situation which is both concrete (the shallow rivers, the bridge, the broken city involve "Warsaw, 1945") and general (everyone at one time or another must turn to their dead,

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and their defeats). This context has brought Milosz to certain realizations about poetry, and himself as a poet and moral agent. Poetry cannot serve univocal theory, which becomes the official lie; it cannot be the instrument of mere passion; it must go beyond the naiveté of inexperience. Milosz gives himself, and any poet, this admonition, and concludes the poem with a resolve to do a particular act in fulfillment of universal principles. The act is writing the poem, settling with his dead; and it fulfills the injunction that poetry must save nations and people. For maintaining our conversation with the past, with each other, is our best hope; and forty years later, in another country, even in translation, this poem still questions us.

## II

Milosz often complains about nature and the necessities with which it threatens us. His extended, sympathetic discussion of Blake's opposition to the strictness of Newtonian physics in *The Land of Ulro* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984) can be summarized thus: "The problem that engaged Blake would loom increasingly larger, in both range and magnitude, up to the present: The fact that the Particular has been consumed by the Universal." In *Visions from San Francisco Bay* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982) he announces, "[I do not like] the natural order, which means submission to blind necessity, to the force of gravity, all that which is opposed to meaning and thus offends my mind. As a creature of flesh, I am part of that order, but it is without my consent." And in Chapter 3 of *The Witness of Poetry*, called "The Lesson of Biology," he writes: "Nature in its incredible prodigality, producing the billions of creatures necessary to maintain the species, is absolutely indifferent to the fate of the individual. Once integrated into nature, man also changes into a statistical cipher and becomes expendable." I think there are really two issues here, which Milosz doesn't always distinguish in his arguments. As a poet and a moralist, Milosz is worried about the hegemony of scientific theory. As a mortal creature with a Catholic upbringing, he is also worried about embodiment.

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The hegemony of scientific theory intrudes on our lives in more than one way. Reductionist theories of human nature pretend that people are like blocks and pulleys, that their actions are motions subject to physical laws and thus determined, inevitable, amoral. Moral responsibility as a category drops out of the description of human affairs. Thus, moral disputation (and poetry) are simply by-products of our confusion about ourselves, which we can ultimately do without. Theories about human nature cannot dispense with values, however, and in fact such theories bring values in again by the back door. But then their practical effect is pernicious: for their authority as 'theories' discourages practical deliberation, and their pretense of being value–free theories masks the way they impose values in rigid and often inappropriate ways. Here we recall Milosz's complaint about the deployment of Marxist theory.

Even if one grants, however, that the application of scientific theory to people is inappropriate (as Milosz surely does), one might wonder what to make of its application to other creatures and entities. If the "rest" of nature is accurately described by science, then it is merely a realm of necessity, where things cannot be otherwise, and therefore is not subject to deliberation. If it has no moral dimension, then we have no responsibility towards it. The hegemony of scientific theory then dictates that we take only a theoretical, not any moral, interest in the rest of nature. And this also disturbs Milosz.

But Milosz tends to deal with this disturbing issue in too simple and dichotomous a fashion. He often argues as if our only choices are to construe nature as a machine with the scientists, or to construe it in magical, anthropomorphic fashion as did the peasants of his native Lithuania. In a poem "To Robinson Jeffers," protesting Jeffers' portrayal of nature as "an inhuman thing," he concludes: "Better to carve suns and moons on the joints of crosses / as was done in my district. To birches and firs / give feminine names." Neither alternative satisfies him.

Milosz (and all lovers of poetry and nature) would do well to recall that nature, science, mechanism and even necessity are themselves essentially contested concepts. The testimony

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of science is more complex than he allows, and besides, it is not the only source of reliable testimony. First of all, science is not a single theory, but a patchwork of heterogeneous domains, each with its own characteristic items, problems, methods and theoretical components. The objects of some parts of science (say, physics and mathematics) indeed behave predictably, as if they could not be otherwise, and an important part of our cultural coming of age was to recognize clearly how these levels of existence do not act like people. But all the objects of biology (and biology itself is an internally heterogeneous collection of domains) have a cognitive as well as a causal dimension. Sentient, self-reproducing organisms are already, in a rudimentary way, expressive and social. Words like information, communication, error and correction are as central to the vocabulary of biology as are molecule and cell.

Piffle, scoffs the reductionist; these structures are all "really" described by chemistry. The reductionist, however, has failed to deliberate properly, by not meshing global pronouncements with attention to cases. Those who study the history of science, the actual practice of scientists, came to regard 'reduction' as a plurality of special strategies for relating the results and methods of various sciences. The description of, for example, genetic phenotypes in terms of biochemical processes is one such (highly successful) strategy. But in fact and in principle no one-to-one correspondence exists between the descriptive terms of macroscopic genetics, and the chemistry of DNA and RNA; the items and problems of the more highly organized domain do not collapse into that of the simpler one. Two distinct sciences remain, with a new pathway between them.

Science enters into moral deliberation on two levels. (So there is no good reason why we do not write more poems about science.) First, even if the objects of scientific study are plausibly described as subject to necessary laws, the practice of science is a human activity which always requires deliberation (by both scientists and laity). The debate about the meaning of 'reduction' is a good example of this. Second, the heterogenous plurality of the sciences testifies to the variety of natural kinds; the more highly organized of these exhibit genuine intentionality, which already springs the trap of the

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classical conception of cause and effect. Thus at least part of non-human nature shares with us sentience, choice, expressiveness. We may debate about how extensive this part is, and how morally compelling we find this mutuality, but even science does not preclude some fellow-feeling with the rest of nature.

Finally, science is not the only source of evidence relevant to the latter debate. Scientific knowledge does not exhaust our experience of nature, even if we want to disallow some aspects of the peasant or tribal worldview. The subordination of the theoretical interests of the sciences to the practical interest of deliberation gives priority to our ethical and aesthetic understanding of the world. A great deal of social reality escapes the nets of science; and we have no reason (either moral or scientific) to deny the sociability of other creatures. The sad irony of the second part of Milosz's "Three Talks on Civilization" admits as much:

> Yes, it is true that the landscape changed a little.
> Where there were forests, now there are pears of factories, gas tanks.
> Approaching the mouth of the river we hold our noses.
> Its current carries oil and chlorine and methyl compounds,
> Not to mention the by-products of the Books of Abstraction:
> Excrement, urine, and dead sperm.
> A huge stain of artificial color poisons fish in the sea.
> Where the shore of the bay was overgrown with rushes
> Now it is rusted with smashed machines, ashes and bricks.
> We used to read in old poems about the scent of earth
> And grasshoppers. Now we bypass the fields.
> Ride as fast as you can through the chemical zone of the farmers.
> The insect and the bird are extinguished. Far away a bored man
> Drags the dust with his tractor, an umbrella against the sun.
> What do we regret?—I ask. A tiger? A shark?
> We created a second nature in the image of the first
> So as not to believe we live in Paradise.

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It is possible that when Adam woke in the garden
The beasts licked the air and yawned, friendly.
While their fangs and their tails, lashing their backs,
Were figurative and the red-backed shrike,
Later, much later, named *Lanius collurio*,
Did not impale caterpillars on spikes of the black thorn.
However, other than that moment, what we know of nature
Does not speak in its favor. Ours is no worse.
So I beg you, no more of these lamentations.

The only real way to reduce (in the Comtean sense) a biological entity to chemistry is to kill it. If we do this enough, we will kill all our delights and then ourselves. Yet Milosz is not simply making a point here about the environment; he also reminds us, in the last six lines, of the amorality and inhumanity of nature. The shrike impaling its living food on a thorn recalls another strain in the conversation: our membership in nature brings with it not only gratification, but also pain and death.

The topic of science frequently prompts Milosz to discuss the metaphysics of Simone Weil, as it does at the end of "The Lesson of Biology." He regards her as a thinker who "could cope with great reduction, but who at the same time would offer a new opening and a new hope." Weil extended determinism to all the phenomena of this world, including the psychological. This world was then the domain of the Prince of Darkness, evil when it diverts us from the good, evil because the good is wholly absent from it. Our plight does not however impugn the goodness of God, but rather proves it: He withdrew from his creation out of love for his creatures, to make way for them. Weil called reality the veil of God.

Weil's ethic is wholly colored by her repugnance to corporeal existence; our only hope of salvation is renunciation. All gratification is destruction; we must refuse to eat the objects of our desire, loving not them, but our hunger. If we can keep ourselves empty, grace may enter, but that is God's free gift and has nothing to do with us. Indeed our only hope is to disappear into him, paradoxically to be eaten by God. Thus Weil, like that other paradoxicalist, Shestov, so admired by Milosz, ultimately fails to preserve the integrity of the self.

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My objection to Weil, which could be lodged against her master Plato (or at least a certain brand of Platonism), is that she wholly subordinates gratification, gratification relevant to particular embodied human beings, to renunciation, and fails to connect the good with the everyday. Specifically, she grants no positive role to the messy, pedestrian business of moral deliberation, which gets us from one day, one task to another, and which, not inessentially, requires that we delay some gratifications in the interest of identifying and enacting others.

Though his interest in Weil is so strong that he translated her *Selected Works* into Polish, Milosz does admit that her neoplatonic intellectuality was too much for "a romantic nature lover who in the Ponary Mountains collected specimens for a herbarium and who hunted with Jozef Maruszenski on the outskirts of the Rudnicki Wilderness," who could not, in short, renounce the pleasures of hunting, eating, descriptive science, friendship or the peculiar claims of a locale. Yet on some level he retains, like Weil, a mistrust of the body and of discourse; and so he often fails to oppose her more extreme opinions, without quite going to extremes himself. At the end of "The Lesson of Biology," he quotes uncritically her castigation of the surrealists, who, she felt, "expressed the frenzy of total license, the frenzy which takes hold of the mind when, rejecting all considerations of value, it plunges into the immediate." Weil is of course blind to the virtue of the surrealists, which was their appreciation of the sensual imperfect abundance of experience. And she reproaches them for not having values; on her terms, they could not have values, for they were searching for them in the wrong place (this world). On the contrary, their failure was a lack of eloquence. The myth of automatic writing left their work gnomic, private, and opaque; they failed to clarify and thus make effective their values for themselves or anyone else.

Neither science nor religion can furnish values a priori, which can then be applied automatically and without ambiguity to all cases. The pretense that such values exist leads to a dangerous silencing of deliberation. Values are essentially contestable. But we need not therefore despair that "the frenzy of total license" will ensue. For we always deliberate, and write poems under severe constraints. We begin with a situation which is both universal and concrete, both local and typi-

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cal, and resolve to take some action in fulfillment of certain principles. Our locality presents us with specific problems and gratifications, and limits our perspective, beliefs, tastes, means and sphere of action. Universal principles are limited by the requirements of deliberation itself; we cannot choose principles which entail silence. (This meta-principle is itself subject to deliberation; yet however it is locally determined, it constrains.) The process of deliberation is the construction of an imperfect, orderly social reality, governed by a flexible but still determinate system of rules. Deliberation is constrained because we must come to conclusions and act; poetry is constrained because it must be relevant to moral deliberation. Indeed, the worst kind of chaos (like that which Milosz suffered and exorcised) results in the wake of attempts to impose one rigid construal of values, allowing one voice in the conversation to drown out all the rest.

## III

Obviously, writing a poem is not the same kind of contribution to the human conversation as taking part in a school board meeting, a strategy session of the Opposition, a judicial process. Like Milosz, I want to say that poetry has a role to play in our moral improvement and I share his hope that such improvement is possible. But in my concern to exhibit the moral function of poetry, and to segregate and chasten *theoria*, I have risked assimilating *poesis* too strongly to *praxis*. Poems, as art, are distinguished from practical deliberation by their freedom and form.

A poem need not refer to an actual situation or propose a specific course of action. It may contain such reference, and it will always be grounded in the poet's locale and the concerns which arise there, but a poet is free to construct exotic and historical situations, utopias and antiworlds. Part of moral education is the cultivating of moral imagination, learning to think through how principles might bear on lives and dilemmas different from our own. Fictional cases enrich and round out our fund of experience, rendering it more systematic and cosmopolitan. Of course, it is also in part the poet's responsibility to make these exotic constructions accessible, to

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exhibit their analogy with the experience of a possible audience. To this end he may use specific strategies, like Homer's use of the simile to relate the heroic world to the domestic, agrarian world of his audience, or rely on the universality of the principles embodied in the story. The reader too is responsible for applying his cosmopolitan, historical and systematic critical abilities to the poem, in order to bring it close to the sphere of his own experience.

The freedom of poetry is thus always useful, but its usefulness takes on a special poignancy in times of trouble, when silence rules. People caught up in social catastrophe (anarchy or a too-rigid order) have reason to recoil from their circumstances; a good poem offers an alternative reality, critical insofar as its analogies and disanalogies with the present are clear, hopeful insofar as it presents a reality which is plausibly human. When circumstances are so cruel that one hardly knows how to begin to deliberate about them, poetry may offer an interim means of expression. Poems are repeated by the solitary prisoner to affirm the conversation now lapsed, the gratifying world now in abeyance. Poems are often told about the silenced, so that they won't be forgotten, nor the moral significance of their lives left out of the conversation. And the defensively self-righteous, shamed and frightened aggressor may also sometimes be haunted by poems persuading him to listen. Poetry does not replace practical deliberation, but may instigate, deepen and protect it.

A good poem must also have enough formal integrity to make it worthy of being repeated and memorized. Part of a poet's education is technical; he or she must listen to the classics and do enough five-finger exercises to master the rhythmic and phonic resources of the language and tradition. In this respect, poetry, like music and painting, does have its experts. And such expertise is somewhat independent of moral sense. But even this area of mastery shades imperceptibly into moral terrain. What counts as euphony cannot be disentangled from clarity. For example, Strunk and White teach that passive constructions most often constitute bad style in English; they "sound" awkward. At the same time they obfuscate by masking attributions of agency, an unclarity with direct moral bearing. Moreover, prudential wisdom must be eloquent to be effective; eloquence is persuasive. And part (but

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not all) of eloquence is an attention to form: balanced periods, colorful figures, symmetry of argument and counter-argument.

A poem is compelling, and is preserved, because it is beautiful. The aesthetic appeal of a poem itself has a moral dimension, allying it to an ethic of gratification. Reading a poem should provide the joys of aesthetic satisfaction. It should refine our ability to hear and see, our delight in a particular language, in the sensual presence of life in a particular locale. And thus it persuades us of the pleasures and intrinsic value of this world. This point is worth emphasizing, since I have been focussing so much on the critical, mourning and forgiving functions of poetry. But a poetics in which they are foremost would be morbid; rather, these functions are justified and motivated by our sense of the goodness of existence. If we are not persuaded of the goodness of existence, there is no hope in whose service we can responsibly act; there is no point in living, or talking, or writing poems. Eloquence can be abused, but the cure for that abuse is not silence and deformity, but more eloquence and more beauty.

In Chapter 4 ("A Quarrel With Classicism") of *The Witness of Poetry*, Milosz worries that the freedom and formality of poetry impede its ability to testify to the real. He cites Erich Auerbach as pointing to a certain lack of reality wherever a convention is used: "where the poet creates as beautiful a structure as possible out of topoi universally known and fixed, instead of trying to name what is real and yet unnamed." And he further remarks: "The world exists objectively, despite the shapes in which it appears in the mind . . . That objective world can be seen as it is; yet we may surmise that it can be seen with perfect impartiality only by God. Intent on representing it, the poet is left with the bitter realization of the inadequacy of language."

On the contrary, language, concepts, conventions, topoi, et cetera, reveal reality. They describe the parts of reality "which could not be otherwise" (though they reduce its complexity) and they construct social reality, the issues we deliberate about (though they can be criticized and revised). Milosz's "bitter realization" is due in part to his misology and in part to his detour into an epistemological blind alley. This blind alley, which has trapped some but been avoided by most

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Western philosophers, is the supposition that ideas are the immediate objects of experience, proxy-objects which stand *between* us and things. The best way to avoid this error is to recall that all our interaction with the world is cognitive; to have an idea about something is to understand it. We do encounter the world directly, and our access to it is by means of ideation. Where else could we live but in the world, and how else could we experience it except through consciousness? This epistemological stance excludes divine intuition and causal interaction as models for the way we know.

For most utilitarian purposes, we can describe medium-sized dry goods, rocks and top hats, in fairly exact and unambiguous terms; other people understand the descriptions right away and we don't need to deliberate about them. (I am here bracketing certain difficult issues raised by scientific description of physical phenomena not directly accessible to the senses.) In such cases, the naive notion of mimesis seems plausible; language accurately represents reality. Milosz sometimes argues as if all a poet need do in pursuit of the real is to describe more medium-sized dry goods, in more detail; this picture accords with his nominalism in an odd way. Thus he characterizes the poet's confrontation with the real as "that elementary contact, verifiable by the five senses, [which] is more important than any mental construction. The never-fulfilled desire to achieve a mimesis, to be faithful to a detail, makes for the health of poetry." But then why should we complain about the inadequacies of mimesis? Milosz's complaint arises when he shifts examples in mid-stream without admitting what he is doing. He shifts from things to events of great moral complexity, and then rightly observes that mimesis, simple and complete description, cannot capture the ambiguous reality. Instead of blaming the intervention of the 'veil of ideas', he should see that deliberation, the construction of social reality, and not mimesis is the relevant poetic activity. The demands of realism and the employment of conventions, ordered forms, are not incompatible.

Consider the poem "No More" which he quotes in the course of this chapter:

I should relate sometime how I changed
My views on poetry, and how it came to be

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That I consider myself today one of the many
Merchants and artisans of old Japan,
Who arranged verses about cherry blossoms,
Chrysanthemums and the full moon.

If only I could describe the courtesans of Venice
As in a loggia they teased a peacock with a twig,
And out of brocade, the pearls of their belt,
Set free heavy breast and the reddish weal
Where the buttoned dress marked the belly,
As vividly as seen by the skipper of galleons
Who landed that morning with a cargo of gold;
And if I could find for their miserable bones
In a graveyard whose gates are locked by greasy water
A word more enduring than their last-used comb
That in the rot under tombstones, alone, awaits the light,

Then I wouldn't doubt. Out of reluctant matter
What can be gathered? Nothing, beauty at best.
And so, cherry blossoms must suffice for us
And chrysanthemums and the full moon.

The erotic metaphor is centrally important here. It depends on the old convention that women and matter form a metaphoric unity and stand in opposition to man-spirit. Milosz has chosen not only women but prostitutes, especially prone to reduction to the flesh. This convention allows him to employ the sleight-of-hand which I have just noted in an especially elegant way. He suggests that the woman-thing can be plausibly mimed and then, recalling that she is a person in a moral context of great complexity, announces that mimesis must fail to capture her reality. Thus the poet must rest content with mere convention.

If this poem were only an epistemological mistake, it would not compel our attention as it does. For we can see that the poem engages reality despite the disclaimer, and its success is not merely the accurate recording of detail. What I find so attractive about the poem is the richness of nuance in the poet's depiction of the courtesans and of his relation to them. Milosz initially presents them as languid beauties, trafficking in pleasure. The entrance of the skipper of galleons reveals

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them as both agents and commodities in an economic transaction and also, where the red weal marks a belly like a little wound, women who must make their privacies public. Their vulnerability results from the special risks of their trade (disease, sterility, death; the stigma of sin) and the general burden of mortality. In their final appearance, they are literally reduced to a collection of bones, mixed up with a comb that alone commemorates vanished beauty. Like Carpaccio, to whose painting the poem makes reference, Milosz balances the demands of aesthetic paganism and Catholic asceticism; he mourns and celebrates these women who, like him, endure their mortality even as they (paradoxically) await the light. The tense, erotic sympathy which exists between artist and human subject applies as well to Carpaccio and his original models and, no doubt, to the artisans of Old Japan who commented on human affairs when they used the convention of flower and moon.

Evidently, I resist the convention which structures this poem and for so long has consigned women to passivity, impurity and self–enclosure. I am disturbed by the unconscious ease with which Milosz deploys the convention, even though in the end he manages to undermine and complicate its usual import. Having once reduced the courtesans to matter, he then reanimates matter, making it reluctant, resistant to amorous possession by the word. I might conclude that a better way to think about the relation between enspirited matter and the word is not rape but marriage.

In this summary comment, I have tried to show how the conventions in Milosz's poem contribute to the conversation in which we are all engaged. Speaking out of his local concerns as a poet and his cosmopolitan acquaintance with history, painting and religion, he uses conventions authoritatively to construct and reveal moral realities. These conventions are always subject to further evaluation and revision. His poem constrains and illuminates, but does not dictate, the reader's appropriation of it as part of a moral education. Entering into a painting by Carpaccio, or a poem by Milosz, reveals that moral education is not just an undertaking of great seriousness; it is also an opportunity for affirmation and delight.[1]

[1]I would like to acknowledge my debt in this paper to essays by Eugene Garver and Joseph Schwab on practical reason, by Judith Van Herik on Weil and by Yves Bonnefoy on Shestov.

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MARK PERLBERG

# Summer

I am watching the gardener trim our lawn. He pushes a mower with a wooden handle over the grass, making dark stripes where he cuts. The blades purr, sending up a little stream of green as he pushes and pulls the mower forward and back. The green arc sprays into a canvas grass catcher hooked to the mower's wheels. I sit on the steps and tease a beetle with a blade of grass as it moves up the slate walk. On the long summer days between the times when the gardener comes with his truck and his men to trim and edge the lawn and cut the long hedges, *I* cut the grass, pushing our wooden mower. Or maybe I only dream it, because I am very young and the sweet grass smell engenders dreams. I water the lawn with the long rubber hose, sending a fine buzz of water tickling down my arm, dripping on my sneakers. Each day is stretched, is strangely long, and when the sun presses on the tops of the trees at the edge of town, it floods the lawn with the clearest watery light. Mother talks with someone on the porch. Their voices blend with the purr of the mower and the hiss of the water. The house is cool and airy. The winter rugs and drapes and bedspreads have been taken up and stored in the attic. The chairs wear cool summer coverings that are crisp and shine a little in the afternoon light. We still live in the big brick house at the head of the street. Father hasn't died yet.

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HERBERT MORRIS

# Reading to the Children

The first child asks me: Are these poems yours?
The second asks: Where do you get ideas?
The third child says: I have always loved poems.
The fourth child wonders: What makes poems poems?
The fifth one asks: Which of them is your favorite?
The sixth one asks me: Is there ice cream later?
The seventh child asks: Is a poem dreaming?

To the first, who now fidgets with her hair,
inspects her nails, her dress, who may, in fact,
have little need to know what she has asked,
for whom the question, as well as the answer,
may well prove merely one more temporary
distraction in a day filled with distractions,
I say: Yes, these are poems I have written.
I could read no one else's half so clearly,
with as much feeling, as I read you these;
that, more than anything, may be what I would
leave with you, feeling—music, of course, meaning,
certainly, but first feeling, feeling foremost.

The second child, holding his head to one side
as he speaks, pokes a finger in his ear,
looks at me as a child looks at "a poet"
who may never before have seen a poet,
seems in need of an answer to his question,
an answer I do not have, yet I answer:
I may not know where an idea comes from;
perhaps for days a phrase repeats itself,
perhaps a title, words which, isolated,
lack all meaning ("blue plums"); or situations
present themselves which seem, somehow, imbued
with those lights, half-lights, shadings, which address you

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intimately, beyond all explanation,
whispering in your ear of resonance,
promising difficulty, complication.
I am able to glimpse, half-glimpse, its contours,
feel the weight it displaces (dimly, vaguely).
I am moving from darkness into darkness,
from mystery to deeper mystery;
what I see seems no plainer, seems no clearer,
the deeper I go, than it seemed, but rather
infinitely more complicated, darker.
If my answer succeeds in making nothing
simpler than it was, fails, utterly fails,
at illumination, it will convey
an approximation of my own state.

The third child smiles, nods her head up and down,
this way and that, assenting, acquiescing,
wanting me to agree, needing to hear
I, too, the poet, too, "always loved poems."
I am unable to confess that to her.
To the nodder I say: I did not love them
for what may well have been too long a time.
Apart from jingles we were taught at school,
I did not know just what a poem was,
what poetry might be. Only much later,
having by will, with effort, I suppose,
struggled to lead myself directly to it,
to bring myself to it, at last confront it
(convinced, I now suspect, I needed, needed,
to know what poems were, or poetry),
applied myself—what philosopher said
"It is all a matter of application"?—,
read poet after poet, some too facile,
some too windy, some few whose lines I cherished,
those who drew me closer and closer to them.
I have not, I admit, "always loved poems,"
but those I came to love I live with, fiercely.

To the fourth child, sitting cross-legged before me,
light-haired, green-eyed, quite puzzled, Lady Wisdom

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in a reflective mood, sensing which questions
beg to be asked, which never need be asked,
wanting, as any bright child wants, to know
why what I have been reading are called poems
(rather than maps, or cats, or inundations),
I convey, once more, doubt, uncertainty:
These are poems because I call them that,
because, when I think of them, I think: "poem."
Should it please you to call them something else,
cucumbers, avocados, I accept that:
what you will name a poem is a poem,
becomes a poem, in the act of naming.
If this seems arbitrary to you, lacking
precision, the sheer weight of scientific
provability, it will have succeeded
in translating something of our dilemma.
We begin in ignorance, move through darkness
into the darkness, end in ignorance.
Poems are that, precisely: expeditions
mapping terrain where we have never been,
the landscape of the country of our blindness.

The fifth child, wearing white shorts and a smile
from here to there, and past that, wanting neither
the feel of things, their tone, their texture, nor
the consolations of exactitude,
statistics which, in time, attach themselves
to the object, whatever its name, under
scrutiny at the moment, asks my favorite
(as though that mattered), could as well have asked
the exact height and weight of each, how many
teeth each possesses. This is my response:
After completing "A," I liked it, liked it
better, perhaps, than what had come before it;
but when "B" seemed to drive a little further
into the dark surrounding it (a progress
meager, at best, those slow, minute advances
barely perceptible at such close range),
"A" was replaced by "B," however briefly.
Now I feel about "B" it may have said

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too much and, at the same time, said too little,
went not as far as, once, it seemed to go,
not as deep as perhaps it might have gone.
Each poem seemed, just finished, what I wanted,
thought I wanted; viewed from this distance, middle-
ground, back-ground, none seems what I had intended.

The sixth child blinks his eyes, swivels his head,
left to right, right to left, then rolls his tongue,
smacks his lips, makes a sound one-part delight
to one-part sheer boyish anticipation.
In the light of the values he assigns,
fails to assign, reminded once more of
the place of words, the homelessness of words
("Words, in the end, words alone, are what matter,"
that philosopher said, or might have said),
I feel it necessary to respond:
Ice cream? Of course there will be ice cream later,
more flavors than you knew existed, cookies
shaped like cottages (plumes of chocolate coiling
from crumb-top chimneys), candied apples, plum tarts.
By the time the desserts are brought and passed
(I suggest this for your consideration,
no more than that, one possibility
among the many which may offer themselves),
what you have heard (and, hearing, felt) may well seem
more astonishing than the crisps, the pastries,
the butterscotch napoleons, the rum balls,
mocha parfaits, coconut wafers, jam cakes,
the goblets of vanilla-laced-with-mangoes,
brought on trays from the pantry. One can know that
only at the conclusion, having sampled,
one by one, what was deftly laid before you,
poems read, plates passed, music heard, half-heard,
a judgment reached, or not reached, a choice made.

The seventh child addresses principles
fundamental, it would seem, to the context.
This seventh child has learned what I have not:
how not to be seduced by strains of music

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glimmering in the words, above, beneath,
by floats, delights, whips, fizzes, freezes, sundaes,
concern for logic, reason, meaning, order,
for the demands of shapeliness, proportion.
He scans the sky with those dark eyes, he calls
a bird by its true name (a "ring-tailed swallow"),
he claims to hear the pounding of the surf,
the sweep of rain across the dazzling air,
although the sea lies days and nights from here
and storms have not been forecast for tomorrow.
I answer awkwardly, and yet I answer:
I hesitated when it was proposed
I read to you from poems I had written,
not because I would have denied you music,
not because I would not have had them touch you,
could they have touched you, but because my dreams
now seem the subject, have become the subject.
To read these poems to you is to tell you
what I dream, what my name is, who I may be.

Last night I dreamt a poet read to children,
seven children, each of whom asked a question
having, for the most part, to do with poems.
The lines the poet read were his responses,
his attempts at responses, to those children;
each of his answers asked more than it answered.
The poet wore my face, his clothes were my clothes,
the voice was mine, pitch, range, inflection, timbre,
the dream-words in that dream-mouth were these words.
I was the man who stood before them reading,
you were the children, you, the seven children.
These were the lines I dream-spoke, line by line,
this was the poem, this, the very poem.

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DOROTHY ROBERTS

# The Shack

When travelling I kept seeing an occasional
shack on the mountainside clinging

When travelling I would see it and go by
with it still in my thoughts no matter what next
and my sorrow for it somehow clinging and remembered

It was the shell for a form of life I apprehended
when travel is done and the language of life
and the beat of the landscape give back the self

and passing by
I thought of shells each the same and different

That was when I travelled and now here
in the mountain hut hear the wind go by
and the rain come so close that it is here
and the snow covers all

This is the hut of life the tarred boards
echoing the rain supporting the snow-cloud

giving themselves to a domain that has little other word
than the wind bringing down the leaves at the window

An echoing kind of place where I dwell now
remembering sometimes any passing sorrow

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JEROME MAZZARO

# Packing Away This Kylix

Packing away this kylix, I take note
of the two heraldic butting goats
now drowning in the box's tissue paper
mindful that from it one day
they will reappear like troubled ghosts—
reminders of how we haunted dealers
for just this reproduction.

The streets are empty after rain.
There is a smell of trees
heavy with raindrops. Now one,
now another neighbor emerges
like spring flowers. Soon the street
will be aflower again with traffic—
all things regaining place.

Still, there is something lost—contexts,
bodies, innocence? Some ancient Greek
once chose this image, knowing
conflict need not permanently injure—
however hurting quarrel is
absence is far more killing.
Take heart from the message. Please return.

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ERIKA MUMFORD

# India Notebook

## In Benares

You follow the bicycle bells, follow the red-eared cow, the street named Bliss to Aces New Deal Hotel: A cool, dim archway, some rickety tables. The smiling host serves tea in a cracked porcelain cup, watches with folded arms as you go through the arch. Expecting a courtyard, you step into a field of corn, green tassels nodding above your head. Beyond the field, a white temple. You are given a cell-like room, a bed narrow as a shelf. Mornings you go to the river, watch the rapt old men with plastic shopping baskets full of water-jars, brass boxes, little whisks. No one notices you, you have become, at last, invisible. One day you wander up the river-stairs into a warren of alleys just wide enough for you. Iron-studded doors bar your way, windows stare past you. The streets curve and branch like a great banyan tree. Each fork ends at a little shrine, a crumbling elephant-god, a garlanded stone. Children flit by, vanish up twisting stairs. Hours pass. Suddenly a young man with a briefcase emerges through a carved door, mounts a bicycle. You follow, running, ducking through archways, nearly lose him among water-buffalo, then burst into the thoroughfare. You look back. The entrance has sealed itself. At Aces New Deal Hotel the host rubs his plump hands, brings a fresh pot of tea. The priest from the temple hangs his black umbrella on a stone lotus, comes through the corn to sprinkle you with Ganges water and auspicious rice.

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## A Bowl from Kathmandu

I am holding a bowl
made from a human skull.
Edged in silver, it gleams
with the lustre of old ivory.
My friend and I
stare at one another across its rim.

An aging lama
willed it to him
for teas of healing or of ill.
Roots and blossoms
from the slopes of the Himalayas
hang in twisted bunches from the rafters.

He warns me
there is power in it:
a small black hole
shows where, in meditation
a spiritual light was focused, so intense
it burned the bone.

Who would dare
use such a cup? Weeks later
my fingers curve in dream
around that smooth, pale weight,
the bones perfectly fused
at their dark edges.

The lama's bowl
woke an ancient thirst.
I need to hold it again, feel
the light-struck crown
of the skull, drink
what fills it.

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# Djinns

In little shops
illuminated like stages,
men are taking evening tea.
The perfume seller beside the mosque
is closing his stall
where sweet scents drift and hover,
djinns freed from their bottles
into the stale air.

Night, black as bombazine,
drops down. The djinns prowl the streets,
seeking the unsatisfied.
The men around the bootleg fenni seller
begin to murmur
of black gold in Kuwait, lateen-rigged sails
in secret harbors, watches.
sewn into ragged sleeves.
Crows, roosting in treetops, jeer.

The perfume seller
lifts the edge of his robe
out of the dirt as he walks. A paper bag
holds the day's profits. He wishes
for mutton kebabs in curds, and a girl
that glows beneath her veils
like a rubbed lamp. Tonight
he will sleep content. Tomorrow
he will conjure back
to their translucent leather flasks
Gul Mohar and Sandalwood,
and Damask Rose, his unquiet servants.

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## In the Karma Bazaar

I should have run to you, Mother,
when his hand touched my shoulder. Stained fingers,
cracked long nails that scratched my skin.
Was it his eyes, the promise of a creature masked
that bound me? More intimate
than my own self, my familiar from childhood.
Yet I bite my hair to keep from crying out
when I glimpse you
still searching for me in the bazaar.

I saw you again, today.
You went from stall to stall,
your mouth moving, your hands
making their hopeless gestures.
The henna merchant went on polishing
his jars. The fortune teller squatting on the pavement
spat over her shoulder. *Nahi, Memsahib,*
they all said. *Nahi,* said the ragged boys standing around.
The hunchback who sells love powders and human hair
offered to buy your braid.

Weeping, you went on
toward the shops where they sell
rabbits and song birds in wicker cages.
You passed so close
I could have tugged your skirt.
Crouched in the painted doorway
where we whisper our bargains
to those desperate enough to seek us out
I held my veil closed. Already he has threatened
to sell me
or set me free.

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JAMES FINN COTTER

# Memory

Ten years ago this morning father died.
Light rain was falling: he went out to wipe
His Chevy down in a chill December drizzle.
When from the front door mother looked for him,
He'd stretched out by the far side of the car
Face upward with his arms crossed on his chest
Like a granite–carved Osiris or the Christ
Of the Last Judgment on the high Celtic cross
In the ancient churchyard at Monasterboice:
His body cold as stone and just as dead
In that instant—he lay in his plaid jacket
With hat still on—from cardiac arrest.

"Happy the corpse the rain falls on," flashed
Through mother's mind, remembering a phrase
From childhood and the days in Dunderrow
Up at the farm the Finns tilled on the hill
Above the Cotters' plowland in Shippool
Where Kitty first saw Jim across the fields
And loved his gold-flecked eyes and light red hair.

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WILLIAM VIRGIL DAVIS

# Tapestry

Veins and arteries carry the blood from corner to corner. The interpretation is easy once you find the right place to begin. The Duke, on his white stallion, has killed a knight from the invading army near the center of the scene. Three of his own followers lie in a heap at his feet. There are too many corpses to count. A small stream winds through the valleys, the rolling hills of the background, done in a flourish of autumnal color. In the lower left-hand corner, worked intricately into the dense undergrowth, is the small signature of one of the women who worked her life away on the other side of this scene, in the cold tower where the tapestry, for centuries, has hung.

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ROBERT SCHULTZ

# It Is Not Yet Morning, but Morning Rises

It is not yet morning, but morning rises
In dreaming eyes, though strangely

Vast, and a morning like evening.
In dream I attend to the changing sky

And its rustling sound, its rasping
Dry and tindery sound like autumn leaves.

It is not the sound of autumn leaves,
But a change in the sky, some final stress

Of extremest weather, or of weather's end.
Then lines appear like veins of leaves

On the high, cold blue, and shards of it slip
To wheel in the air, careening the way

Bright leaves drift down. I watch the sky
Shift steadily down with emptying eyes,

Leaving blankness there, a whiteness not light—
The air, the blue, all dimension gone.

Then I wake in a room I have never seen,
In an unknown world, though my own.

Familiar birds sing familiar songs,
But differently now, from trees whose whispers

Arouse the doubts that pilgrims know
When they step at first onto newfound land.

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# Analysis

Hefting the axe-head,
Throwing it down through
Oak's red heart,

I wonder and swing,
The wide blue day opening
Worlds within worlds

In winter branches,
In shadowy centers
Of boxwood shrubs

Where the quick eye lingers,
Curious after the hidden
Root of what it sees

And hardly believes:
A globe of living forms
Afloat in glittering air.

The steel head cleaves
Fragrant slabs from rounds,
Uncasking intoxicants—

Wood's bouquet like
Burgundy aged
In the innermost rings.

Slabs clatter;
Kindling splits
With a few more strokes;

But still red oak holds
Tight in its grain
A bottomless space

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Where planets swish
And imagination dives in vain
For grounding or platform.

Meanwhile, back in the bluish
Light of early December,
Two emparadised birds

Are whistling, hidden in pines,
And deep inside a whorl
Of hardwood, blade against burl,

The axe-head rests.
I pry and hammer, pry
'Til the splitting handle snaps,

Then carry the whole
With its swallowed wedge
Back home to my grate,

Where the knot I could not
Break with my axe,
The fire unties.

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EMILY HIESTAND

# Planting in Tuscaloosa

Three women are walking in Alabama.
My mother and I help my grandmother walk
around the field where she planted and raised.
As we circle the land I think of the way
women will sometimes stroke a belly with child.
My uncle's tractor combs the deep red clay.
Now she wears a housecoat.

Summers—I stayed with her and rode the glider
on her porch—cement painted pink.
I watched her wave a paper fan printed
with pictures of Jesus in unbelievable colors.
She waved away the sulphur smells that blew
at night from the Warrior River Paper Mill.
Once a man reading Sunday papers
in my bed asked me if I had page twelve;
I said I didn't have it. Then he asked
for page fifty; I said I didn't have it.
Then he asked for page seventy-three
and I said, "Go Fish," and we laughed
for ten minutes and made love and laughed.
Those laughs were courtesy of my grandmother.
She played Go Fish with me for hours,
managing a dumb wedge of cards
while I was mesmerized by the distinctions
between diamonds and hearts. How
could any adult love a child enough
to play a game like Go Fish for hours?
Now she calls us to her room.

Every summer another tree was covered
by the swarming kudzu vines that grew
taller and taller than the men with machetes.
A glass kept on her Bible magnified the word.

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The women snapped beans in Sister's parlor
and watched As the World Turns on TV.
"Laura, was that Brian with you in church?"
Snap. Ping into the metal colanders.
I tried always to get the whole string off,
counting how many were right—two—then a goof.
How did she get the beans to snap so
and always get the whole string off
and watch television and talk all the time?
Now she is heaped with gladiolas.

Two women are walking in Alabama.
My mother and I walk arm in arm in her field.
The tractor harrows and dust begins to rise.
I stand ankle-deep in the field.
I am given her porcelain pitcher to keep.
Bits of clay cling to my feet.

## On Nothing

The problem is the dissection problem.
*Let me have at that frog.* One lays open
a tiny heart and slimy little lungs
and is sickened by bullfrogs mottled in pond water,
mating forever. Is it too much or too little love
for the world that moves one to despair
in this life about the despair of nothing after life,
which this life briefly—badly—interrupts?
It is true, nothing is unfamiliar to us,
accustomed as we are to linoleum, wool snoods,
hands in pockets feeling the working hip bone.
But nothing is not despair, nor dark, nor pain;
it is none of these, and that is the point.
So, if driven by fear of nothing, despair
is a simple mistake, a bit of a joke.

And what a waste of the gaping something to think

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that because it is over soon, it is a groaning
effort to haul the sun each morning, to scurry
around a pyramid of footstools and improbable beings,
frantic as mimes to prop up pieces that wobble
toward nothing—inflated marvels rolling
toward drains or manholes.
And too, it's unclear that eternity
has claim to meaning, or that if we had longer—
forever say—we could do better than we do
at five in a wagon, at eighty brushing the hair
from the forehead of a new youth.
Eternity seems an unlikely place to look
for more. Those twin prongs of before and after
seem merely to hold the middle ground like skewers
on summer corn so we may bring it tidily to our lips.

In fact, we don't really know that there is nothing.
All that we are and all that we aren't—it's not that.
The process of oceans grinding shells to sand
and sucking it back for bottom dwellers—it's not
even that. It is our invention—zero—
an idea for which there is no evidence.
The great metaphor of empty space is false,
full of red suns rising in every direction.
A vacuum is light. A leg severed
is memory. A child unborn
is regret or relief. An accident
avoided is a picnic by the road
with Dairy Queen burgers in thin tissue wrappings
smelling of salt and blissful grease.
Except that we think of it, and on occasion—
groping for a nameless quarter—will feel the pull
of a thing beyond reckoning. But to think of it—
even to name it nameless means: *that* is not what we face.
Either our minds are famously unreliable
and we should get on with folding napkins and sheets
steaming from the iron, or our thoughts
are not aliens, rather emitted from nature like shad-roe,
oxides, uranium or burls. If so, these
conceptual visions of nothing, at which we excel,
are pictures of home, to be admired more stringently.

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PATRICIA TERRY

# Tropical Architecture

What seems to have been lacking
when I first admired the palm trees,
the Royal Palms,
was remembering how certain Egyptian columns
swell out like slender ladies
neatly wrapped down to the feet,
to a mathematical elegance of line
found, more often than not,
in natural things
like those horizontally banded trees
rising grey-brown straight
toward parenthetical curves
and a bright green Modigliani neck
above which unwieldy coiffures
click and interlace in the breeze.

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VERNON YOUNG

# *Dangerous Moves*: Three of Them

A FELLOW FILMGOER WHO SAW *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* in the same week as he saw Alan Bridges' *The Return of the Soldier*, to which I had personally given high praise, said that he thought *Spider Woman* was, by comparison, more profound. As to that, we don't need to confront these films, one with the other; they are not really comparable in any way that's fruitful to talk about. But conceptions of profundity in the movies are worth a quibble. I have a distinct feeling that the considerable number of people who have made exalted claims for *Spider Woman* have been moved to do so—apart from their justifiable pleasure in the acting of the two principals—by a sense of obligation towards the subject matter, which may seem to touch profundity because not only does it tackle political suppression and torture, it is unabashedly sympathetic toward the homosexual ambience which is currently all the go.

From a novel by Manuel Puig, the film script was by Leonard Schrader, the direction by a Brazilian, Hector Bibenco. When you film a story that takes place for two-thirds its length in one stifling space area—in this instance a prison cell—you need to have more resources (of structure and witness point) than, in my opinion, are shown by Schrader and Bibenco. Taken as a whole, it's an inartistic film; it tries to urge too many dualities at once and overlapping: deception and truth, love and sex, illusion and reality, despotism and solidarity, *them* and *us*!

Molina, a camping homosexual (William Hurt), has been assigned to a cell with Valentin (Raul Julia), a political prisoner, in order to extract from him, if possible, clues to the identity of his collaborators on the Left. (*We* don't know he has been so assigned until later in the game.) Molina spends hours of his time relating to Valentin (who is fairly contemptuous of him) a favorite corny movie, which is periodically visualised for us and which he insists, too often, is his way of escape from an otherwise oppressive situation. The interjection of this film is supposed to be a sustaining motif of the one we are primarily viewing. That supposition destroyed much of the conviction I might have experienced had I not been exposed to Molina's taste for drivel. I found the interloper so gruesomely unfunny, with its colossally ham acting and its idiotic conceptions, that every time this prancing fairy telegraphed its recurrence I wanted to scream or hide under my seat. What made it even more intolerable

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was someone's notion (Puig's or Schrader's) that this had been a Nazi propaganda film! No such production of the Third Reich was ever like this—they had their own drawbacks—it resembled more closely a third-rate Hollywood film from way back; whatever its model, it was dished up too many times to get a smile from me.

Early in the narrative I suspected that during its course the prisoners would reverse their acts; the gay would drop his condescension and become politically committed; Valentin would relax his intolerance of the homosexual embrace. I wasn't disappointed—or I should say I *was* disappointed because my prediction was so tidily confirmed! Molina falls in love with Valentin; Valentin succumbs tenderly. Upon being "paroled," Molina agrees to risk his neck getting messages to Valentin's collaborators, after assuring the warden that his efforts at cracking Valentin have been unsuccessful. He is speedily doomed but not speedily enough to cut twenty superfluous minutes from the film. The surveillance squad watches and waits and of course trails him; he is shot down. Meanwhile, Valentin has suffered another "interrogation" and a helpful prison medic is secretively giving him a shot of morphine. Before the end he is inventing a movie of *his* own (not a travesty like Molina's) in which he lives idyllically with his old love, Morta (was her name as contrived as I thought?) who is not a political comrade but a wealthy bourgeoise.

Remorselessly plotted, if not profound. So long as I don't have to accept the implication that we're all queers and dissidents under the skin, I'll concede that thanks above all to Raul Julia and William Hurt moral isolation relieved by love is an irresistible sentiment. But I can't help wondering if Puig's novel is as glib in the telling.

I'm surprised that a French film, *Dangerous Moves*, now disappearing from cinemas for a spell, has not been more favorably received, for it has two potentially attentive audiences: those who play chess and those who just like a good political thriller. Yet despite its having earned a Foreign Film Academy Award a year ago, it seems to be relatively unknown—outside New York City, at any rate. The circumstances under which the scenario was conceived are astonishing. The script was written (by Richard Dembo, who also directed) as an almost direct imitation of an event that was taking place even as the film version was being prepared and modified: the World Chess Championship in Geneva, 1983, which was not concluded until 1985, when the completed film was already in circulation.

As in actuality, *more or less*, the chess players in the film were an aging and long undefeated champion (Akiva Liebskind), representing the Soviet Russian *status quo ante*, if only because he was too indifferent to politics to hold unorthodox opinions, and his young rival, also Russian, but a defector of five years standing, who has renamed himself Pavius Fromm and lives in Switzerland. (I think

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the original challenger was an anti-Soviet Ukrainian.) Dembo's film "anticipated" the outcome of the historical event: again, *more or less*! To what extent political intrigue tried to carry the day but failed (in the manner of the film) is of course a likelihood we are welcome to imagine if we accept the writer-director's insinuation that the State (or call it the Party) would stop at nothing to retain its prestige.

In short (my pet hyperbole): according to the ingenious argument of the film, the Soviet defender (given a Jewish surname for reasons not made clear) is an ailing man (older than his life counterpart), becoming fairly miserable as the tournament proceeds because he is unattended by his personal physician, whose exclusive diagnoses and advice he is willing to heed. Since that physician is notorious for his dissenting opinions, the authorities have not allowed him to accompany Akiva. When, however, they discover that their champion is in real danger of being defeated by the young ex-Soviet, Fromm, they permit the doctor, under close watch, to join his patient in Geneva. Yet Akiva's health does not notably improve and Fromm's confidence prospers to such a degree that another strategy is called for. This time they try undermining the younger man instead of bolstering their past master. Fromm's wife, still in Russia, has been submitted to a sequence of tribunals and commitment to asylums harsh enough to make of her (unknown to Fromm) a wreck of her former self. Hence they decide to send her to her husband, hoping that the shock of his seeing her will destroy his equilibrium in the chess matches remaining. You can take it from there.

My summary might suggest that the film is restricted to a seamless and ugly plot but it isn't as wholly grim as it sounds; there are parentheses of surprising wit. If you know as little about the operative subject as I do, you may find *Dangerous Moves* to be an informative version of the psychopathology of everyday chess, reminiscent of Nabokov's novel, *The Defense*, with the added political dimension to increase its suspense. And a nice touch is the underlying affection that qualifies the professional rivalry of the two Russias. Alexander Arbatt, playing the dictatorial young challenger, is a welcome newcomer. But in fact all the performances, save that of Liv Ullman as Fromm's wife, are first-rate. Something went wrong, in her impersonation or in the script; she did not appear to be a severe casualty of political mistreatment. Exceptional supporting roles were those of Leslie Caron (*l'immortelle*!) as Akiva's subordinate mate and of Daniel Olbrychski (a Polish actor) as a cynical KGB agent. Surpassing them all is Michel Piccoli; his Akiva dominates the screen story, even as he loses the tournament. Dedicated, querulous and alone, he conveys beautifully a sense of tragic futility and resolve, the fate of a man who has given up everything and everyone (save his patience-on-a-monument wife) for his mastery of the complex and tyrannical art of chess.

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As much as any film I saw in the last year I enjoyed *Plenty*, a sophisticated variant of a familiar theme: the dissatisfaction with safety experienced by those who have tasted danger. The innovative condition here is that this disparity is the burden of an English female, Susan Traherne (Meryl Streep). After the passion and the idealism with which she had joined the French Resistance of World War II, she finds postwar England, in an age of plenty, devoid of that zest for life and argument which had become for her the *raison d'être*. Unable to trim her emotional and intellectual resentments to proportions within which society at rest functions, she has become compulsively addicted to being honest where she is required only to be reasonable. Her frustration when faced by what she believes to be spiritual temerity or social hypocrisy tends to increase her disregard for the self-defense of others and her sarcasms become in turn the more monumental.

Her husband, no fool, divines the source of her disappointment and realizes, at a climactic hour, that this way, her way, of paying off everyone for her personal confusion, is a lost cause. Whereupon he tells her, in effect, that her insurgent tauntings of the guests in her drawing-room are not heroic; they are expressions of arrogance and self-congratulation; they are unrealistic, quite, since they ignore the universal habit of compromise contrived by society at large which has found no more effective way of managing reality; and if that is indefensible, she will not improve it by a wishful return to those combative months of the war when life was simple because it was reduced to a hairline choice.

Not at all sobered by her husband's challenge, Susan drives herself further into a mutinous pitch inseparable from sheer madness. When she re-encounters her lover from the Resistance days we momentarily expect that she may have been concealing the principal source of her discontent. But after going to bed with him again she coolly dismisses him and announces solemnly that the most important thing in life is to live alone. That this is one self-delusion more is I think made clear by the closing flashback to the French countryside of her war years, the setting which had induced in her a sentimental nostalgia for the peasantry and hence for an age which can never be retrieved.

This disclosure seemed to me, at least, more conspicuous than the adverse criticism levelled at English society which David Hare (who wrote the screen adaptation of his own play) has elsewhere isolated as the guiding resonance of the movie. "The years of austerity in the late forties are followed by the years of plenty in the mid-fifties, and it's a recurring feeling in the film that it is money that rots people." A bewildering proposition, this; that being rich does more damage to people than being poor I'll not argue here. But *no one in the film* is depicted as rotten! At their worst they are obtuse! Hare's intentions seem to have been radically divided. Surely the coherent

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subject of the movie is not the society under attack by Susan, but Susan herself and the inference that being in the right is all too often a dubious advantage. This is the end to which the film has been subtly shaped by its director (the Australian, Fred Schepisi) and this is the commanding impression given by Meryl Streep who, appearing in nearly every frame, remains alert to every shade, of wit or of moral indignation or of self-imposture—a stunning performance which I think no other American screen actress could have so securely carried off.

*There is poetry here*

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RICHARD HORNBY

# Shavian Dark Comedy

UTA HAGEN'S PERFORMANCE IN THE TITLE ROLE of Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* at the Roundabout recalled Coleridge's remark about Edmund Kean, that seeing him act was like "reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning"; much of the performance was murky and indifferent, but the moments of high emotion were brilliant and startling. Hagen's voice is gravelly and unvaried, and her diction sloppy. (I couldn't help thinking that if I, who know the play well, kept missing words and phrases, the other audience members must have been losing a good third of her speeches!) Her English accent was unlike anything ever spoken anywhere in the British Isles, and was not even consistent within itself. Her face is as homely as a potato, making it a problem to accept her as a character who once earned her living by selling herself to men, and who specifically says at one point that all she had were her appearance and charm to do it with.

And yet, as with Kean, one forgot all these things during the emotional peaks in the role. At one point near the beginning of the second act, for example, Mrs. Warren, alone with her daughter's fiancé, takes the handsome young man's face in her hands, and impulsively kisses him. Hagen made the moment sensual, without the slightest vulgarity; suddenly we saw her as a delightful young girl again, shy, spontaneous, and utterly charming. The kiss was erotic, yet at the same time had the quality of a child stealing from a cookie jar, as she turned away immediately afterward with a naughty giggle and chided herself. For an instant, she almost looked beautiful.

In her scene with Vivie in the second act, in which Mrs. Warren describes her early life and her reasons for going into prostitution, Hagen was similarly spontaneous, but in emotional moments that were raw rather than delicate. The lines in this great revelation scene about Mrs. Warren's "respectable" sister, who went to work in a white lead factory, where she "only expected to get her hands a little paralyzed; but she died," combine all the anguish and indignation and sense of helplessness that characterized the great social protest movements of the late Victorian era. Hagen captured this; her diction cleared, her voice lost its hoarseness and became powerfully resonant, while in a controlled fury she raged against the system that could permit such horrors. The moment was a living *cri du*

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*Uta Hagen and Pamela Reed in "Mrs. Warren's Profession"*

Photo credit: Martha Swope

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*coeur* from an era that is often wrongly dismissed as complacent and dull.

The play is one of Shaw's less popular ones, for the simple reason that much of it is not funny. Shaw characterized it as one of his three early "unpleasant plays," which also included *Widowers' Houses* and *The Philanderer*, the former a heavy-handed indictment of slumlords, the latter a satire on "Ibsenites," the vague term commonly applied in the 1890s to progressives of various persuasions. All three plays, written in the early nineties, show the influence of Ibsen in this sense, and even more the influence of Dickens, being characterized by social protest, satire, vivid but flat comic characterization, and little verbal wit. (Shaw did not develop his famous "Shavian wit" until later, under the influence of his friend Oscar Wilde.) *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is the only one of the three that is a major work. Its young heroine is Vivie Warren, a "new woman" (the Ibsen connection again) who smokes cigars and drinks whiskey, and who has just taken a mathematics degree from Cambridge and is about to study law. She is courted by an amiable young fellow named Frank Gardner, who wants to marry her for her money but who loves her nonetheless. Vivie has never known much about her family, nor where her money came from. The possibility of the impending marriage catalyzes a series of revelations: Vivie, despite her comfortable and respectable upbringing, is illegitimate; her mother, Mrs. Kitty Warren, is a former prostitute; all of Mrs. Warren's and Vivie's income came from Mrs. Warren's "profession" of prostitution.

Vivie finds the revelations about the illegitimacy and prostitution shocking, but, "new woman" that she is, becomes reconciled to them; her mother, after all, had a "bad lot." But when she realizes that Mrs. Warren is still in her profession, a vast, enormously lucrative, international prostitution racket overseen by Mrs. Warren and a cynical, rascally friend named Crofts (who at one point had pursued Vivie), she renounces her mother, and Frank too, since he is penniless and cannot afford to marry Vivie without her money. The thrust of the play is thus strongly didactic, but, as with Ibsen's social plays, the social protest is never mere sermonizing. Vivie's idealism is counterpointed by her iconoclasm; she may reach a conventional decision, but she does so by unconventional means. Her mother is not a stereotyped prostitute with heart of gold, nor an equally stereotyped whore with heart of steel, but rather a practical woman with a good business sense. Crofts is a blackguard, but, like his successor Andrew Undershaft in Shaw's *Major Barbara*, he has a shrewd realism about life as it is actually lived that often makes him sound refreshing.

The production, directed by John Madden, underlined the austere, didactic, moral nature of the play. The stage was practically bare, with only a few essential pieces of furniture, employed against

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a background of gray screens that could be shifted about to suggest changes of locale. The costumes, although more or less in period, were designed more for emblematic statement than for historical accuracy; for example, Mrs. Warren's dress had the lurid pink and charcoal colors of a Good & Plenty candy box, a ludicrous extreme for the 1890s, but expressive of the ambiguities in her character. The lighting was harsh, bright, and cold throughout, in keeping with Bertolt Brecht's "alienation effect," in which lighting destroys rather than creates a mood.

Except in the case of Uta Hagen, the acting was similarly cold, clear, and unemotional. Pamela Reed, as Vivie, and Harris Yulin, as Crofts, were especially fine, giving performances that were precise, acerbic, and rich in detail. In the process, there was a loss of emotional power—Vivie's intimate moments with Frank seemed far less sexual than Mrs. Warren's brief kiss!—but at the same time the play's moral message was correspondingly heightened. The directing of classical plays is more a matter of trade-offs than is commonly realized; rather than create an "ideal" production, the director often has to emphasize certain aspects at the necessary expense of others. Madden, in choosing to emphasize the moral issues in the play, made it seem particularly fresh and contemporary; the hypocritical relationships among prostitution (and other vices like drugs), poverty, and big business are no less significant in the smug Reagan era than they were in the so-called "gay nineties."

It was ironic that the American actors in the cast gave performances of a sort often associated with a European style, with the emphasis on character delineation, while Hagen, although trained in England and a well-known acting teacher, was the more typically American, with the emphasis on emotional spontaneity combined with an indifference to technique. It is to director Madden's credit that he held the production together, making the line of action always distinct (despite Hagen's wretched technique, even in her scenes it was always clear what was going on generally). The blocking, which is difficult on a bare stage, was graceful and pictorially informative; pace, rhythm, and timing were flawless. Equally to be commended were the set designer, Andrew Jackness, the costume designer, Nan Cibula, and the lighting designer, Frances Aronson, who all worked so well in the difficult, "Brechtian" style. This was a production that told the play's story, which is harder to do, and less often achieved, than is usually appreciated.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

# Pope's Conspiring Hand

> But in his eyes the shapeless vicious scene
> Composed itself; of folly he made beauty.
> —David Ferry: from "Johnson on Pope"

Over forty years ago, in December of 1944, a young professor of English at Yale gave a talk to the English Graduate Union at Columbia University titled "On Reading Pope." It was Pope's bicentennial, and the professor, Maynard Mack, confessed to his disappointment that there had been so little attention paid, during that year, to his poetry. Mr. Mack's own experience in the academy since 1936 had shown him that Pope was a poet "more often written about than read and less often read than misread," and his talk was an attempt to suggest, with reference to passages from "Windsor Forest" and the third Moral Essay ("To Bathurst") why it was essential to read Pope "with the most scrupulous attention, weighing every word." Even that was not enough, since, he went on to point out,

> Successful reading of poetry, it seems to me, consists in a delicate adjustment between our apprehension of the poem as a whole and parts, a system of interior relationships and something outside it that I shall call its "matrix."

This matrix consisted of everything the reader had assimilated from the literary and racial past, so Mack brought to bear on "Windsor Forest" and the Bathurst epistle relevant passages from Milton's *Paradise Regained*, Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Wordsworth's *The Recluse*, as well as brief allusions to Spenser, Donne, and Virgil. He concluded by speaking of Pope as a great poet, not the poet of complacent rationality or common sense—Matthew Arnold had called him "the high priest of our age of prose and reason"—but one from whose pages gleam "that complex ironic view of the grandeur and misery of man, the precariousness of his predicament, and the enormous importance, therefore, of preserving and extending the little he has achieved."

With those words, which one likes to think the graduate students took to heart, Maynard Mack began his lifetime effort to preserve and extend Alexander Pope's achievement as a poet. In "Wit and Poetry and Pope" (1950) he brilliantly examined Pope's imagery by way of complicating the notion of him as a poet who—unlike the

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Metaphysicals and the Moderns—wrote the "poetry of statement." As the great Twickenham edition of Pope's works appeared in the 1940s and 1950s, Mack edited and wrote lengthy introductions to the volume containing the *Essay on Man* and the one containing the translations of Homer. In 1969 he published *The Garden and the City*, an elegant consideration of the relation between "retirement" and "politics" in Pope's later work. Most recently he collected his various writings about Pope, including discussions of things like Pope's library, his poetical manuscripts, his letters. Now, crowning it all, comes this masterly biography which will surely take its place in the top rank of such efforts as Bate's *John Keats* and Ellmann's *James Joyce*, books in which the most painstaking elaboration of the life in all its circumstances is extended in one direction to large matters of European culture and history, and on the other, to the dance of words performed by the individual poem or paragraph.[1]

Have we all been waiting for a biography of Pope? Probably not, since he is right on the line of that divide in English literature between artists whose real-personhood we believe in and want to learn about over the course of a long book (George Eliot, Keats, Walter Scott) and those whom we don't quite believe in as persons (Dryden, Donne, Shakespeare) but rather as mythical presences about whom the "facts" will never be known. Pope and Samuel Johnson seem to me to have feet in both camps, and it is one of Mack's distinctions that, even with gaps in his knowledge of Pope's early career, he makes those early years extraordinarily interesting. Hitherto George Sherburn's *The Early Career of Alexander Pope* was the book to consult on that phase of the life, but for all Sherburn's learning and sanity he can't match Mack's range. In an especially impressive tour de force, Mack launches the book by getting Pope born at 6:45 P.M. on the twenty-first of May 1688, probably at No. 2 Plough Court, just off Lombard Street in the City of London. He then observes that a few weeks earlier, the man who was to become the hero of the first *Dunciad*, Lewis Theobald, was born in Sittingbourne, Kent, appropriately close to, though probably not on, All Fools' Day. Mack notes that "There is something touching as well as funny in the thought of these two, each (according to the theories of their time) a blank sheet of paper awaiting the inscriptions of experience, yet each blindly strengthening day by day toward a confrontation that would initiate the last great English poem in the Renaissance tradition." Not content to leave it there, he adds that twenty days later, James Stuart, "The Old Pretender," is born, whose presence will fuel the controversy between Jacobites and

[1] ALEXANDER POPE: A Life, by *Maynard Mack*. W. W. Norton & Co. $22.50. "On Reading Pope" and "Wit and Poetry and Pope" are to be found in COLLECTED IN HIMSELF: Essays Critical, Biographical, and Bibliographical on Pope and Some of His Contemporaries, by *Maynard Mack*. University of Delaware Press. $32.50.

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Hanoverians, which controversy of course has implications for the situation of Pope, the Roman Catholic poet. This is something like the Grand Style of biographical writing, and Mack rises to it with skill and relish.[2]

If "Grand Style" is too used-up and Arnoldian a term to pin on Mack, still we sense the biographer trying to express in his own sentences some of the qualities of imagination he wants to praise in his subject. So at the end of a chapter on Pope's reading as a young man, Mack quotes a phrase of Henry James's ("the deep unconscious well of cerebration") to emphasize how, decades after reading Cervantes or Montaigne, they remained "sensitively alive" in Pope's mind and could at any moment surface to the enrichment of a particular poem:

> It is to this aspect of Pope's genius that his best poetry owes its deep [resonances,] as voices from many places and times arise from the deep well in a thrilling unison, fortifying, qualifying, complicating each other. . . . Poetry for him, as for his great predecessors, is emphatically more a social than a personal institution; its proper audience a cross section of educated readers; its proper subject the shared common life. To write in a public idiom, and always within the program of reference calculated to draw poet and reader into a community of experience . . . this was the poet's task, as Pope understood it, and for this in the Forest he was readying his powers.

The resonances in Mack's own prose here are strong and important, a consequence of his ability to sound the depths of his subject—to make us imagine that there, in that wonderful place called, wonderfully, Windsor Forest (which he has already richly described) Pope was, indeed, "readying his power," preparing himself for the poetic career that was about to unfold.

Mack keeps us vividly in touch with physical circumstances: of his subject's being swaddled and wet-nursed (Pope probably caught tuberculosis of the bone from his nurse); of being flogged at schools like Twyford and Mr. Deane's before he moved with his parents to Binfield, in the Forest, and took his education into his own hands. There is a fascinating section on Pope's fascination, at age eight, with John Ogilby's translation of the *Iliad*, which Pope referred to as "that great edition with pictures" and which Mack expands on by informing us that "The pages of an average copy of Ogilby's *Iliad* measure some seventeen by eleven inches, allowing the type in which the verse is set to run about the same size as that in a modern

[2] His notes are also in the grand style, running to over a hundred pages and, among other things, paying homage to the countless books to which he is indebted. Page 897 of the notes, for example, mentions or quotes from some eighteenth-century letters to William Shenstone; a collection of Bolingbroke's journalism; a book on John Adams; one on Ben Jonson and the English State; and some sociological writings by Georg Simmel. The notes testify to a command of subject and display a learning that feels natural rather than strained.

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first–grade primer and supplying to the full-page engravings all the space necessary for a commanding clarity of design . . ." That sort of gloss on Ogilby's book is of course the stuff of which forceful biography is made.

He makes compelling the physical circumstance of his tiny subject by comparing him with William Wycherley, who in his old age became one of Pope's first literary friends. Wycherley was a big man ("Manly Wycherley," Dryden called him in his epistle to Congreve), putting on weight in his latter days:

> Pope, on the other hand, was of extremely delicate build and short—after his stoop had taken effect, no more than four and a half feet high. The sight of the two of them together must have awakened in the minds of at least some of their friends—Betterton's for instance, who knew his Shakespeare well—Falstaff's description of himself walking in front of his page like a sow that hath o'erwhelmed all her farrow but one.[3]

Pope's tuberculosis of the bone, now called Pott's disease, produced such debilitations as high fever, inflamed eye, harsh cough, abdominal pain, persistent chill and numbness in the legs; it also led to respiratory problems and, frequently, cardiac weakness. When Pope was forty he wrote to his friend Fortescue that

> I am in the condition of an old fellow Threescore, with a Complication of Diseases upon me; A Constant Headake; ruind Tone of the Stomach; the Piles, a Vomiting & Looseness; & an Excess of Wind. Some of these succeed, the moment I get quit of the others: & upon the whole, indeed I am in a very uncomfortable way.

The most memorable account of his physical condition is Johnson's, in his *Life* of Pope. But Mack makes us feel, as never before, the way in which "this long disease, my life" was for Pope no metaphor merely.

Even more important is the cast of his sensibility, his spirit, his adopted posture toward life. In one of the *Imitations of Horace*, Pope protests that he loves to pour himself out "as plain / As downright *Shippen*, or as old Montagne." Mack finds this protestation at odds with, or at least not touching

> a reserve in him that in some circumstances can edge over into evasiveness, deceit, or chicanery. Even in his letters . . . he often shows himself intensely conscious of the other person, intensely concerned about the impression he himself will make, and thus to an extent on guard, even while he may be urging with complete sincerity the mutual opening of hearts. In the poems the case is

[3] Here is an example of the "must have" biographer's locution Mack has been taken to task for using. But, in this example, even if Betterton didn't in fact think about Falstaff when he saw Pope with Wycherley, the conceit is a good one.

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> similar. Certainly few writers approach us in their work with a voice and presence so ingratiatingly ingenuous yet so artful.

There is perhaps not as much reason as Mack thinks to term this "one of the most perplexing aspects of Pope's career and personality." I know nothing of Shippen, but if the word for Montaigne's address to the reader is "plain," then I never read the "Apologie for Raymond Sebond." As for the combination of ingenuousness and artfulness in Pope's voice in his poems and letters, readers of Robert Frost should not find it overly perplexing or unnerving. Mack tries to account for it by seeing the young man as a Catholic who naturally adopted "the caution and circumspection bred by circumstance into the practices and . . . into the very bones of Roman Catholic families at this period, especially those who had known the suspicions attending them . . . under William III." Further, Pope's cultivation of the habit of performance, of obliging and pleasing his older friends and teachers like Samuel Garth, Sir William Trumbull, and William Walsh (each is finely portrayed in the biography) surely contributed to the ingratiation—for better or worse—of his personal style. Above everything else, there was the physical deformity, instrumental in making him more "situation–conscious, more detached, more studied in [his] own responses than the normal person needs to be." Very sensible, yet ultimately, no more than with Frost, can we "account" for the cast of a temperament.

As for the poetry, my own recent experience confirms that even selected students, good poetry readers, have difficulty reading and enjoying Pope. The only way to help them is by expressing one's own delight in the "performance and prowess and feats of association" (Frost's words from his *Paris Review* interview) those poems embody, especially when the poet is a self-dramatizing, satirical and polemical questioner of a culture, like Yeats or Byron or, above all, Pope. Early in his critical career, Maynard Mack talked about those things, especially in the earlier-mentioned essay, "Wit and Poetry and Pope" and he still uses the performance metaphor in saying about the "Essay on Criticism" that its continuing vitality is to be found in "the felt presence in almost every line of a spirited performer who has at last found himself, exulting like a dancer or skilled gymnast in the fascination of what's difficult" (note the Yeatsian allusion). This spirited performer is what Mack admires when he quotes the following lines from "To Bethel," one of Pope's Horatian poems:

> 'Tis true, no Turbots dignify my boards,
> But gudgeons, flounders, what my Thames affords.
> To Hounslow-heath I point, and Bansted-down,
> Thence comes your mutton, and those chicks my own.
> From yon old wallnut-tree a show'r shall fall;

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> And grapes, long-lingring on my only wall,
> And figs, from standard and Espalier join:
> The dev'l is in you if you cannot dine.
> Then chearful healths (your Mistress shall have place)
> And, what's more rare, a Poet shall say *Grace.*

This is Horace through Ben Jonson ("Inviting a Friend to Supper") and Mack calls it

> one of the most charming pictures in English poetry (visionary, to be sure: a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?) of a way of life in which limit has become freedom, the dancer indistinguishable from the dance, and the apparent bondage of the rhymed pentameter couplet an opening to the gracious rhythms of skilled conversational speech.

This sort of fancy talk is unlikely to help anybody read Pope better, and my guess is that when he took up those lines with a class Mack didn't think of alluding to Browning or Yeats, since he was preoccupied with reading aloud, pausing, commenting on, noting the assonantal and syntactical beauties, the prowess and performance, of a couplet like "From yon old wallnut-tree a show'r shall fall; / And grapes, long-lingring on my only wall." Any teacher of poetry knows what is lost in the move from the uncertain improvisations of a classroom moment to the fixed finish of sentences in print. The problem is only compounded when those sentences must take their place in a biographical narrative that can afford to spend only limited time on the feats of association Pope was so good at. In his treatment of the two great poems of 1735—"Of the Characters of Women" and the "Epistle to Arbuthnot"—Mack's commentary goes flat, consists mainly of a run–through of what happens in each poem, with lengthy quotation but not much analysis.

Some reviewers of this book, notably Robert Martin Adams and Richard Howard, have complained about its highly "colored" (Mr. Adams' word) character in the favoritism shown its hero, and about its intimidating and impertinent (the words are Mr. Howard's) combination of "archaizing rhetoric and peppy neologisms."[4] Howard also objects to and identifies a number of instances of Mack's unchecked habit of allusion and his pervasive speculation on what Pope "must have" felt or thought on any occasion. I was untroubled by the presumed favoritism, and think it right for biographers to put the strongest case for their subject (conversely it is still fun to

[4] Richard Howard missed the following instance of Mack's "peppy" attempt to be timely: "The gin habit, imported from Holland along with William III, had become by the 1730s in all the poorer areas of London as settled a resource against the misery of consciousness as heroin today in the ghettoes of the South Bronx . . ." Why drag in heroin and the South Bronx when the martini—surely a settled resource against the misery of consciousness—still flourishes in certain areas?

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listen to the Reverend Whitewell Elwin denounce Pope's character and verse, in his commentary to the Elwin-Courthope edition). As for the complaint about Mack's diction, it is well-taken in a number of cases: the individual reader will have to decide how bothersome it is over the long run. Still, both Adams and Howard praise the book (Howard calls it "a complete and rewarding biography") despite their annoyances: I should want to claim that the individual failings—of diction or tone—just don't matter that much weighed against the whole success.

The passage quoted above from "To Bethel" contains two lines ("To Hounslow-heath I point, and Bansted-down, / Thence comes your mutton, and those chicks my own") which Matthew Arnold thought infamous enough to prove that Pope was merely a classic of English prose, not a great poet. Mack doesn't bother to confront Arnold (or even mention him here) but surely the couplet in context suggests how wrong Arnold was to clip it out and hold it up as an inadequate touchstone. Yet even if it's not necessary to beat Arnold, a dead horse in this respect, there is still the trouble that Pope, acknowledged as a classic of our poetry, is—like Ben Jonson perhaps?—more acknowledged than read, or not read for pleasure the way Shakespeare is read. It would be nice to think that Mack's book will make a difference, but that is doubtful. There is, however, no doubting the substantial and enduring nature of what he has done for Pope, not least evident in his quoting the following description (from Percival Stockdale's memoirs) by David Garrick of a performance Garrick gave of *Richard III* in a London theater, with Pope in attendance, the year before Pope's death:

> When I was told that POPE was in the house, I instantaneously felt a palpitation at my heart; a tumultuous, not a disagreeable emotion in my mind. I was then in the prime of youth; and in the zenith of my theatrical ambition. It gave me particular pleasure that RICHARD was my character, when POPE was to see, and hear me. As I opened the part, I saw our little poetical hero, dressed in black, seated in a side-box near the stage; and viewing me with a serious and earnest attention. His look shot, and thrilled, like lightning through my frame; and I had some hesitation in proceeding, from anxiety, and from joy. As RICHARD gradually blazed forth, the house was in a roar of applause, and the conspiring hand of POPE shadowed me with laurels.

That splendid last sentence, which spreads the laurels from Shakespeare down to Pope and on to Garrick, can be seen as a demonstration of literary continuity made possible by various conspiring hands, of which the biographer's is the last and most recent to be saluted.

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DEAN FLOWER

# Fables of Identity

JOYCE CAROL OATES HAS BEEN TURNING OUT a lot of costume fiction over the last five years: the family saga (*Bellefleur*, 1980), the allegorical romance (*Angel of Light*, 1981), and the gothic (*A Bloodsmoor Romance*, 1983; *Mysteries of Winterthurn*, 1984). She has long had a fatal facility for these ready-made forms, as the titles alone suggest. If only they were parodies! But her latest novel, happily enough, is genuinely novel: a portrait of the artist, or say rather of someone whose background and talents closely parallel Oates's own.[1] Marya Knauer grows up poor and parentless in rural upstate New York, not far—metaphorically speaking—from where her creator began. Each of the novel's chapters forms a short story, a slice of Marya's life: the story of her father's violent death and the family's disintegration when she was seven; the story of her uncle's family, with her diffident "mother" Wilma (whom she is drawn to) and of her mindless cousin Lee (who abuses her sexually). Subsequent chapters focus on each particular person who defined Marya's life for a time: Emmet Schroeder, who wanted her to marry him after high school; Mr. Schwilk, her screwball English teacher who inspired her; Father Shearing, the dying priest whom she served and would have died for; Imogene Skillman, her college friend who uses and betrays her; Maximilian Fein, the arrogant professor who takes her as mistress and graduate student; and so on.

The strategy works well, providing the economy and concentration of the short story (which has always served Oates well as a constraint on her impulse toward lavish rhetoric) and also aptly expressing Marya's central problem: she is defined by others. There is nothing unnatural or surprising about this when Marya is young—what is childhood, after all, but a time when all the choices are made for you? But as she matures her passive, adaptive, chameleonic nature becomes clear: all her images of herself come from others or from books. She surrenders herself to them—usually they are confident, willful males—and subsumes her identity in theirs. The high school glamor boy whom every girl covets, the theologian-priest, the world-famous literary scholar, the idealistic intellectual who edits an important journal: all these succeed—for a time—in providing Marya with a self, "a life."

[1] MARYA: A LIFE, by *Joyce Carol Oates*. E. P. Dutton. $16.95.

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But she is too intelligent, and too willful herself, to be wholly taken in by others. Marya has the capacity to throw herself into work, especially reading and writing, with an escapist's suicidal zeal. In college she goes on late-night binges of imaginative writing—setting down stories "she seemed to be hearing in a kind of trance," full of "wild, disturbing, unanticipated" subjects that threatened to "push her over the brink—into despair, into madness, into sheer extinction." Here I think we have the paradoxical and prolific Joyce Carol Oates in essence: a writer struggling violently (if it is not too melodramatic to say so) to escape and create herself in words. Her narrative voices are indeed heard in a kind of trance, and it has never been certain what her own authentic voice was. Perhaps there were too many of them, or else as in *Bloodsmoor* and *Bellefleur* the voices were merely derivative. In any case, *Marya: A Life* constitutes the author's coming to grips with her problem and so transcending it. The epigraph from William James gives a hint of this liberation: "My first act of freedom will be to believe in freedom." Her second act of freedom was to go back to her origins and find her own voice. At the end of the novel we see Marya looking at the blurred outlines of her long-lost mother: that won't solve her identity problems, but she is at last looking in the right direction.

E. L. Doctorow has recently attempted an even more autobiographical fiction, a portrait of the artist from earliest bed-wetting memories up to the age of about ten.[2] The narrator, Edgar Altschuler, shares his first name with the author in addition to a lot of other family background, according to my sources. Not only does Doctorow have a mother named Rose and an older brother named Donald (as his protagonist does), but in the course of the narrative they step in to tell portions of the story, like the interviewees in a Studs Terkel history or in Warren Beatty's *Reds*. One can almost hear the tape recorder clicking on. So there is little to prevent the reader from taking the whole book as personal history, a subjective document all right but not one refracted through fiction's usual lenses. Doctorow seems to be reconstructing his first decade not so much to understand himself or ascertain his identity, the way Joyce Carol Oates does, as to evoke the period, passing around a whole lot of old snapshots, setting it down for posterity and the sociologists. We listen to the radio and hear detailed accounts of Lamont Cranston as "The Shadow." We see Zorro in the movie serials. We watch the *Hindenberg* loom over the Bronx skyline on its way to a fateful end. We eat lunch in the automat or at Nedick's, read *Popular Mechanics* or *Flash Gordon*, go to Far Rockaway Beach with hordes of others on hot summer days. The two climactic episodes of the book are equally a matter of typicality. Edgar enters an essay contest on the theme of "The Typical American Boy" (which of course, being Jewish, he is not—poignantly enough) and he goes

[2] WORLD'S FAIR, by *E. L. Doctorow*. Random House. $17.95.

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with his family to the 1939 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows, a long-awaited consummation.

The narrative is free from the excessive manipulations that made *Ragtime* and *Loon Lake* such bogus exercises in historicism; it has instead something of the clarity and specific gravity of *The Book of Daniel*, still Doctorow's best novel. The style of *World's Fair* ranges from the declarative simplicity of a young boy's consciousness to the elegant, carefully-shaped evocation of the remembering adult: "And in my sleep figures would loom in threatening gesture and just as suddenly recede into colored swirling points, as if I myself had been spread-eagled on a wheel spinning so fast that the colors melted together and became a target." But it remains a somewhat disappointing book. For all its elegance and clarity, it's a document of the period instead of the person. When the story ends Edgar is still too young to have taken distinctive shape. The single most revealing detail about him emerges only at the end, when he and another boy bury a "time capsule" of symbolic artifacts, Tom Mix Decoder Ring and the like, for the enlightenment of posterity. At the last minute Edgar decides not to bury his copy of *Ventriloquism Self Taught*, a portent of the writer whose voice he will learn to "throw" into his characters. Trouble is, ventriloquism has become a stunt Doctorow is only too good at; he will impersonate almost anyone but himself. Indeed, he has in a sense no real voice of his own, only the ones he hears in the history books and the family narratives, in the novels and newspapers of his American past. Doctorow's art is to parody those voices in the service of a tireless nostalgia.

The question of identity for a Canadian writer is compounded by his awareness of both British and American traditions, to which he does not quite belong. His or her fate tends to be that of a poor relation, a worthy never fully recognized or praised, although there are signs of a thaw in recent years thanks to such writers as Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood. Canada's veteran writers of reputation like Morley Callaghan and Robertson Davies still suffer from the *oubliettes* of foreign criticism. Edmund Wilson's phrase about Callaghan, for example, still follows him around: "perhaps the most unjustly neglected novelist in the English-speaking world." Callaghan's recent novel[3] derives its title and theme from a metaphor Kipling once used to describe Canada, but if you did not notice this useful information on the dust jacket you would never guess it from the story (perhaps all Canadians know their Kipling). The Lady of the Snows here turns out to be a prostitute named Ilona, who confers her favors upon the suffering—giving solace to any who approach her with shattered egos or depressed spirits, but turning down flat the swaggering well-heeled male who just wants to buy sex.

The idea has its sentimental side no doubt, but Callaghan con-

[3] OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS, by *Morley Callaghan*. St. Martin's Press. $14.95.

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trols it by telling Ilona's story through the eyes of "Gil" Gilhooley, a bartender who has seen a bit of the world and published some fiction. Gil watches while Edmund "Jay" Dubuque, an Edward G. Robinson-style gangster, tries to figure out who the Lady really is. All these characters talk and move convincingly enough, and the setting in a downtown Toronto hotel lounge-and-bar is well-observed. Callaghan's language suits this realism nicely, with its spare, unmetaphoric, colloquial toughness. His bartender owes more to Jake Barnes than to Nick Carraway. As the story progresses the elusive Ilona acquires more history, but she remains ungraspable despite the best efforts of Dubuque. He ends up instead with her tatty mink coat and a dim vision at least of the way human beings should not be used. It's a small-scale novel of modest pretensions, but it does show Callaghan discrediting several of the gender stereotypes he may have picked up from Hemingway, once upon a time, and hinting—if I read the title correctly—at what underlies the abuse of the Canadian land and spirit.

By violent contrast, Robertson Davies' new novel is a boisterous intellectual romp.[4] He too can be rueful about Canadians, but he scoffs brilliantly at life in the Provinces. His hero, Francis Cornish, is the scion of a wealthy family in rural Ontario at the turn of the century. But the story begins in the present day, with Cornish's death, and proceeds as an inquiry into his secrets of identity: his confused engendering in England, the farcical marriage of his parents, his mysterious half-wit brother, his furtive self-discovery as an artist (sketching bodies in a morgue at night), his apprenticeship to a forger of paintings, his tangled history as an anti-Nazi operative. As if that were not enough, Davies provides his hero with two tutelary spirits, a recording angel (Zadkiel, the Angel of Biography) and a daimonic spirit (Maimas) who makes fateful things happen to our hero. Together these spirits see to it that "What's bred in the bone will not out of the flesh," which is Davies' way of emphasizing the idea that design, pattern, and fate are fundamental in life, chance and coincidence incidental. Prudently, however, Davies doesn't insist on this notion: the angel and daimon argue a lot.

A recent publicity photo depicts Davies as Shaw, down to the bristling eyebrows and flowing white beard, and in fact he once wrote under the pseudonym of Marchbanks. Like Shaw, he enjoys superintending and meddling in his own fictions, and if he can shock the complacent he will do so. Here is a fine specimen of a typical Davies diatribe on his native land:

> Whoever lives in the finest house in a small Canadian town dwells in a House of Atreus, about which a part of the community harbors the darkest mythical suspicions. Sycophancy is present, but in small store; it is jealousy, envy, detraction, and derision that

[4] WHAT'S BRED IN THE BONE, by *Robertson Davies*. Viking. $17.95.

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> proliferate. In lesser houses there may be fighting, covert abortions, children "touched up" with a hot flat-iron to make them obedient, every imaginable aspect of parsimony, incest, and simple, persistent cruelty, but these are nothing to whatever seems amiss at the Big House.

Unlike Shaw, there is nothing of the puritan about Davies. In a long brilliant scene in his schoolroom, Francis Cornish is given the benefit of a health lecture by Dr. G. Courtney Upper, who has come to defend the Empire by explaining the mysteries of sex. After a day's rhetoric devoted to "clean speech, clean thought, deep breathing, [and] daily washing of the armpits," Dr. Upper takes the boys aside to discuss their bodies. Shrewdly, Davies presents it all in indirect discourse:

> Purity of body meant a sentimental regard for one's testicles that was only slightly less whimpering than one's love for Mommy. Save for occasional washing they must never be touched, though they might be addressed, if they seemed to demand attention, in the Mommy-style of love but, in this case, also of rebuke. They must be told to be patient until the day when some lovely girl, who had kept herself pure, would become your wife on her way to the final apotheosis of motherhood.

I will let the reader discover for himself the rest of this mad, wonderful scene, except to say that the demented Dr. Upper ends his lecture by putting himself on display.

The novel is garrulous, leisurely, and old-fashioned in its elaborations of family history and twists of plot. Finally it seems too long, as the preparations of the hero for greatness end with so little active result. Francis Cornish becomes a great artist of a sort: a great copyist, forger if you will, who after learning all the tricks from a master invents an original or two himself, works painted so convincingly in fifteenth-century style yet idiosyncratic that scholars assign them their own niche in history. But this is a bleak conceptual triumph, immortality at the price of anonymity. The latter stages of Cornish's life are, alas, anticlimactic. He learns to be so unobtrusive as to be drab, and while that is Davies' point (*ars longa*) it kills the narrative interest. Surely Cornish's daimon could have found a wittier outcome than this?

Both Callaghan and Davies choose extremely nebulous and elusive protagonists, but I see no such tendency in writers who ground their fictions in a particular place, language, and history. Benedict Kiely's latest novel, his ninth (not to mention four books of stories), is so saturated with Irish song and lingo, landscape and allusion, that no matter where his hero wanders he's at home.[5] The wanderer is named Mervyn, and he flies in to Shannon Airport at the be-

[5] NOTHING HAPPENS IN CARMINCROSS, by *Benedict Kiely*. David R. Godine. $16.95.

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ginning of the story after a long sojourn in America, leaving behind an American wife and some sort of academic identity. He's a Brendan Behan type, instantly recognizable wherever he goes, and never shy with strangers or booze. His object is to attend his niece's wedding in Carmincross; but the novel is in no hurry whatever to get him there. Kiely wants his sixty-year-old hero to be immersed gradually into the terrible beauty of his homeland. As in "Proxopera," the long story which concludes Kiely's previous book, *The State of Ireland*, his theme has become the troubles in the North, now everywhere. And his prevailing tone nowadays is bitter: "But a song, a song, give us a bar of song, sing me the songs my mother sang, sing me an old Irish song," Mervyn thinks to himself (he is always listening for such music), but the awful noises on the radio pour in, news of bombings and death and madness, and he comes up with songs like this: "We took a little petrol and took a little gun and we fought the bloody Fenians till we had them on the run," or "We had joy, we had fun, we had slaughter in the sun." Mervyn's associative and elliptical mind is seldom easy to follow, but the Irish music running through his head, even in his dreams, refuses to come out prettily. Hearing that a boy has been killed, an apprentice gardener in Cork "blown to bits on the Border while laying mines for Ireland," Mervyn thinks, "Strange seed, strange fruit, let me lay you a mine for Ireland, lord, and you're nearer God's heart in a garden than anywhere else on earth."

After only a few pages of Kiely's densely-packed, multi-leveled prose poetry, one begins to feel a stranger, up against the barrier (as Dylan Thomas once said) of a common language. Not many readers will recognize all the music, quip-quotations, and parodies that seethe in the narrator's brain. His tone too is frequently elusive: irony and sarcasm as he uses them can be easily mistaken for comedy, flippancy, simple digression. Of outward action the novel contains so little—nothing *does* happen in Carmincross—that even when the climactic bomb explodes we have been so well prepared for it by references to other bombs, sniper fire, and maimed victims of war and terrorism that the main event has little to teach us. And that's sad: Mervyn is a kind of Irish Herzog, ready to celebrate and suffer, and he's not given an adequate action in which to do it.

The setting of Geoffrey Wolff's fourth novel[6] in Providence, Rhode Island, allows him to tell a story no less saturated in its place than Benedict Kiely's. Wolff has listened to a lot of East Coast street talk, from off-the-record mutterings of judges and lawyers all the way down to the slang of hopheads and felons. Providence is called "a jerkwater that outsiders bombed past on their way to Cape Cod" and "a pee-wee metropolis," but "if you lived in Providence it was difficult not to feel a shiver of pride . . . that the whole New England mob got run out of a laundry on Atwells Avenue." Catch the

[6] PROVIDENCE, by *Geoffrey Wolff*. Viking. $16.95.

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way they talk, Wolff seems to say, get the tones and rhythms and lingo right, and you've gone a long way toward finding the identity of a place.

Adam Dwyer is the focal character at first, a hard-nosed lawyer who has just discovered he has leukemia and wants to go out well. Educated at Yale, with civil rights activism behind him, Adam has a reputation for being tough, not very likable, but fair. Providence deals him another low blow when his comfortable home on Benefit Street is robbed by a couple of punks, Baby and Skippy, who soon figure significantly in Wolff's neatly-woven plot. Another chief actor is Tom Corcoran, a cop whose integrity has turned sour, who finds himself for no good reason obsessed by Lisa, a sexy waitress-singer kid whose world divides into two types of experience: a blast or a bummer. Like her boyfriend Skippy, what she wants most out of life is a free ride. Wolff manages to mix the sleaze of gutter talk with his own ironic formality: "Skippy's philosophy of life was that he wanted what he wanted, and he wanted it for free." Or, in an even more obvious mixture, "What [Skippy] would in fact be—grandee or piece of shit—was contingent upon the will of The Boss." All these characters are losers, but some more than others. Virtue consists in knowing how to get out of a jam without too much humiliation. For Skippy this means finally choosing to confront almost certain death; for Adam it requires some degrading compromises and embarrassments. The novel is no masterpiece, but it competes favorably with George V. Higgins' fiction set in the same sort of territory: you read it for its authentic American yawp.

Still another city in which American fiction happens to thrive this season is Florence, in a "cycle of stories" by Richard Cortez Day.[7] Told in a simple, almost off-handed way, these tales of poor Italians, questing Americans, itinerant professors, and other displaced persons issue in moments of release and celebration despite frequently grim circumstances—usually death. First in the sequence, "A Chagall Story" describes the moment of old Guido Ianotti's heart attack and death, but his spirit lives on and soars about. In other stories an American professor is beaten almost to death in his apartment, a street-vagrant obsessed by World War II stabs a man he imagines to be the enemy, and is gunned down by police; couples separate; a daughter leaves her dying father; episodes of incest and rape occur, and there are tales of the syphilitic, the lame, and the retarded. Yet Richard Day manages to give all these narratives its glimpse of redemption.

The girl whose father is dying, Laura, receives a last message from him which explains his choice of an epitaph from Heraclitus: "Men are not awake; they resemble those who are in deep sleep, or they may be likened to the drunken; they are like children, or like the beasts." Then the father writes cheerfully, "Enough said, eh? I

[7] WHEN IN FLORENCE, by *Richard Cortez Day*. Doubleday. $15.95.

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love you, I'm behind you all the way. Look ahead. Have a drink for me!" But Day has more up his sleeve than this. The death scene of old Guido in the first story reappears in the second, from the point of view of a middle-aged American journalist. He notices in the crowd around Guido a young American girl holding a shopping bag—and he somehow thinks he knows what is in that bag. His story has a different destination, but the girl turns out to be Laura of the third story, whose dying father is known to Philip Whiteside, the protagonist of the seventh story—to whom a former student in the fifth story writes a letter. The man stabbed in the fourth story turns out not to be a German but a sick American who visits the hospitalized Professor Whiteside, having confused this one (Philip) with another (Arthur) whom he recalled from his unhappy youth. At this point Day begins concealing the interconnective tissue among his stories more subtly: a thunderclap, a bolt of lightning, a pattern of sunlight and shadow, an arrangement of chiseled stones, a certain church or *piazza*—anything may suddenly provide a reference point for seeing temporal or spatial overlapping in these separate stories. For the alert reader Day provides a few sly commentaries on his method. Here the owner of a bookstore explains the argument of a book he'd like his customer to read:

> "There's an implicate order, hidden within and under the explicate order where we live. From time to time, one of us, usually a scientist or a poet, catches a glimpse of that hidden order. The implicate order, a secret flower perpetually unfolding, but we're too blind, too set in our habits to see it."

In another story a priest watches a crowd of people in the rain, everybody moving in different directions and yet together, "never quite touching" and "the traffic moved, the people moved, in a complicated arrangement by which each person had a modicum of space, though all were together." Whether this complex narrative design be the celebration of a religious writer, who believes in the implicate order of the Creation, or simply the exuberance of a careful craftsman who has taken great pains with his work, would be impossible to say. Perhaps both are true. In any case, even without our recognizing any implicate order in Day's stories, they remain interesting, moving, and often just plain funny. Read the one about the Americans from Connecticut who pay too much for their apartment in a story justly called "Idiots."

But perhaps the most brilliant technical achievement in recent months belongs to Mario Vargas Llosa.[8] Set vividly in his native Peru, the novel begins in what might be called the very near future: the wasted urban chaos of modern Lima as it succumbs to confusion, indifference, and despair. As the novel tells us repeatedly,

[8] THE REAL LIFE OF ALEJANDRO MAYTA, by *Mario Vargas Llosa*. Translated from the Spanish by *Alfred Mac Adam*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $16.95.

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conditions in Peru will only get worse, with vultures, roaches, mice, stinking garbage, people digging through the trash for something to eat or sell, and man-made ugliness everywhere. The narrator sums it up succinctly: "If you live in Lima, you can get used to misery and grime, you can go crazy, or you can blow your brains out." This is a political novel, a darkly skeptical scream of protest, yet at the same time it coolly offers a history lesson. Vargas Llosa's speaker (virtually himself, it seems) tells the story of his research for a book about an old school friend, Alejandro Mayta, a fire-breathing Marxian idealist who led an abortive insurrection twenty-five years before in a tiny little Andean village. Much if not all of the story is really in the foreground, now. In attempting to dredge up and sort out the contradictory past, the narrator brings Peru's present more and more sharply into focus. As historians know, the truth lies in the story-teller as much as in what he says. History is fiction, or rather fictions. Vargas Llosa clarifies this point early in his book. When various witnesses ask him why he wants to know what really happened if he's only going to write a novel, he says: "Because I'm a realist, in my novels I always try to lie knowing why I do it. . . . And I think the only way to write stories is to start with History—with a capital H." The novel's title in Spanish is *La Historia de Mayta*, which perhaps conveys his conception better; "real life" smacks of the sensational.

The most effective narrative trick of the novel is to switch repeatedly back and forth between the narrator's interrogations in the present (first person) and his conjectured reconstructions of Mayta's experiences (third person) in the past. This unremitting montage demands that we see everything about Mayta in the context of its sources, not least the narrator himself. "I" is "he" and "he" is "I." The device is amazingly simple, and even natural given the subject, and it makes for wonderful immediacy. One of the best scenes is the long interview between the narrator and Mayta's former wife Adelaida, who broke with him when she discovered his homosexuality. Or is that the narrator's homosexuality? Adelaida is hostile and defensive, traumatized still by the shock of discovering her husband's sexual nature. She still tries to shelter her son from any knowledge of his father. Approaching this material Vargas Llosa cuts so rapidly between "I" and "Mayta" that the two effectively become one:

> "Do you mean that your husband takes him to Mass every Sunday?" Mayta said, thinking aloud. My memory brought back to me a whirlwind of prayers, chants, communions, and childhood confessions, the collection of colorful holy pictures I stored in my notebook as if they were precious objects.

We have just seen the counterparts of these pictures—of Mayta's son—in Adelaida's hands, hesitantly given to the narrator, and in a

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moment it will be Mayta's voice remembering his school fellows, then "I" seeing them as well, both reconstructing the son from these memories. It's a vertiginous narrative experience, yet perfectly clear.

My only complaint with the novel is that its inner narrative—no matter how mythic and problematic it may be—needs more vivid episode. Vargas Llosa resembles Manuel Puig in his heavy dependence, in this novel at least, upon colloquy. Mayta is represented by all as having much more physical energy than we are ever allowed to imagine him using. Mightn't some more interesting stories have been conjured up about him, to enliven the dull Marxist indoctrination material for example? But the climactic anti-climax, Mayta's disastrously ineffectual "insurrection" (the very word belies what happens) is worth the long wait. And so too are the visits to Lurigancho Prison. For every excursion into the past, the author returns us to a bleaker present. On the last page of the book we are back exactly where we began. It is after all Vargas Llosa's history lesson to resist mere story. I withdraw my complaint.

By painful contrast, Margaret Atwood's latest attempt at a political novel is a fizzle.[9] Partly a disutopia in the manner of *1984*, partly a futurist fable to mirror the present (*Looking Backward* would be a remote ancestor), and partly a "what if?" *jeu d'esprit*, the book simply founders on its own uncertain conception. What if, Atwood asks, there were a violent overthrow of our whole North American liberal permissive pluralistic capitalistic democracy, a sort of moral *coup d'état*? What if we had instead a "Republic of Gilead," a Bible-quoting communistic patriarchy in which the procreation and care of children was the essential activity—apart from the suppression of savage customs like talking, touching, drinking coffee, reading, and playing Scrabble? Atwood's "what ifs" are so lacking plausibility or inevitability as to be embarrassing. Yet she exercises her considerable novelistic gifts in making the narrative human and disturbing—if you can forget about the absurdity.

The protagonist in this theocratic police state is a Handmaid, whose function is to be impregnated by a Commander and provide the Commander's Wife with child. Handmaids wear scarlet robes, gloves, and shoes, and are blindered in white-winged nuns' hoods. Other functionaries of importance are the Aunts, whose role is to indoctrinate (they carry cattle prods); the Marthas, who are household servants, the Econowives (working-class drudges), and at the lowest level the Unwomen, all the infertile and inconvenient who are banished to the Colonies to sicken and die. The three major rituals of this realm are Birthings, when the Handmaids deliver and the Wives pretend they did, Prayvaganzas, when group marriages take place, and Salvagings, when the insubordinate are ceremonially hung. Alas, Atwood is committed to playing all this as solemn nightmare, and must hide her natural sarcastic wit under a bushel. For

[9] THE HANDMAID'S TALE, by *Margaret Atwood*. Houghton Mifflin. $16.95.

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what the whole futurist invention comes down to is a symbolic fable of the present. Its topic is gender conflict and its theme is that males have positions of apparent power but are in reality lost, self-estranged, and choiceless, while females are powerful but divided against themselves, authoritative but vulnerable. In a typical confrontation here is how the Handmaid thinks: "She watches him from within. We're all watching him. It's the one thing we can really do, and it is not for nothing: if he were to falter, fail, or die, what would become of us? . . . But watch out, Commander, I tell him in my head. I've got my eye on you. One false move and I'm dead." Clearly the only politics involved in this novel is sexual. In tenderer moments the speaker laments lost freedoms, especially the freedom to touch and communicate with men, the freedom to fall in love. Why Atwood imagines these as imminent losses is anybody's guess.

At some sort of opposite extreme of mad permissiveness is Robert Coover's latest invention, equally a fizzle.[10] He deserves to be paired with Atwood, though: both contrive nightmares of sexuality. Coover takes your typical American cocktail party, stocked with figures we know from Updike and Cheever perhaps, and starts the festivities with a murder in the first sentence: "None of us noticed the body at first." Things run amok, as if Luis Buñuel or Hieronymus Bosch had taken over the set. Coover's first sixty pages are quite dazzling: a savagely funny exposure of sex and obscenity in what passes for polite society. It all focuses on Gerald, our host, who strives to be all things to his greedy guests (of whom there are about a hundred too many) and fulfill his own erotic fantasies besides. In a seamless pell-mell narrative, Coover gives us the several levels of Gerald's overburdened mind (seeing, listening, planning, remembering) as well as the constant interruptions of competing voices. Soon the bad party turns awful: blood, vomit, excrement, copulations, smashed glass, broken furniture, theft, another murder—and yet, for a while at least, it all makes a dreadful kind of sense.

Precariously Coover manages to balance the grotesque and horrible with humor. No matter what atrocity may have just occurred, Gerald manfully strives to keep everybody's glass full. No matter what foul lewdness goes on in the kitchen, Gerald's wife keeps busy making canapés and dip. Into the lurid anal-erotic scene in the upstairs bathroom comes Gerald's mother-in-law (saying "Tut tut") and Gerald's wakeful son ("Shouldn't you be in bed?"). Into the darkened sewing-room crowded with busy copulators, including Gerald, comes Gerald's wife: "These are our new neighbors from down the street, Gerald. Mr. and Mrs. Waddilow." But a little of this sort of thing goes a long way, and Coover doesn't let up for more than three hundred pages. He's really better in shorter works like *Charlie in the House of Rue* (1980) and *Spanking the Maid* (1981), metafictions which make interesting conceptual points and quit. To

[10] GERALD'S PARTY, by *Robert Coover*. Linden Press/Simon and Schuster. $17.95.

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my mind his best work is still to be found in *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969), his collection of shorter pieces.

Both Coover and Atwood diminish human beings into conceptions, or mere outlines, so interested are they in the original logic of their designs. There are no mysteries of identity—of individual persons—for them, not at least in their recent novels. Not so for Iris Murdoch. Despite her inclination, as one trained in philosophy, toward governing her fictions by ideas, Murdoch always yields instead to her sense of the ultimate complexity and mystery of individuals. For without that, there would be no secrets or surprises, the very stuff of life in her fiction. That in fact is what saves her latest novel from a bad case of over-writing.[11] The protagonist is Edward Baltram, a nice young man who begins things by killing his best friend. More accurately, he gives his friend Mark a sandwich with a narcotic drug in it, enjoys Mark's unambiguously ecstatic experience, and then—when Mark falls asleep and he has safely locked the apartment door—Edward leaves him for about half an hour. When he returns, Mark has fallen out of the window to his death. The rest of the novel follows Edward's struggle to find some terms on which he can live with himself. Exonerated by the courts, he remains in a personal hell. His half-brother Stuart seems to be the good apprentice of the title: a brilliant student, Stuart decides to opt out of the world's contaminations and devote his life wholly to becoming good. Not surprisingly, the brothers have little to say to each other. Murdoch fills out her large cast with Edward's manipulative Uncle Thomas, a psychiatrist; Stuart's father Harry, who has a ludicrous affair with Thomas' wife Midge; Edward's mysterious artist-father Jesse Baltram, whom he soon seeks out as part of his rehabilitation; his two stepsisters Bettina and Ilona; Jessie's eerie wife Mother May, and as usual a good many interesting others.

While Stuart simply hovers, Edward goes to a sort of magic castle called Seegard, the realm of his awesome but mainly invisible father. Edward needs to find some blessing from the god-like Jesse, he thinks, but Jesse's cryptic women seem to block the way. In fact all Edward's experiences at Seegard baffle solution; events there are by turn magically sublime and prosaically grim. Deciding which is the problem the whole novel turns on. After reading more than five hundred pages I discovered that the best answer to this problem appears on page two. Edward and Mark are conversing; Mark of course is "high":

> "How things are." [says Mark]
> "Yes." [says Edward]
> "How they are. They are in themselves, they are, I say, *in themselves*, that's the—the *secret*."

Unlikely as it may seen, this is wisdom. Things are only themselves,

[11] THE GOOD APPRENTICE, by *Iris Murdoch*. Viking. $18.95.

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exist only in themselves, and are not contingent for their meaning on "higher" realities or "deeper" identities, pre-existent ideas, symbolic constructs, hidden meanings, abstractions, theories. Or as Mark puts it a moment later, "there's only one . . . Anything." Edward's floundering efforts to put his life back together after Mark's death fail because he seeks an Answer, a unifying cause or explanation, a fixed star to guide his life, a God, a Father, a Truth real as a rock. He can't accept the integral disparateness of things. But until he does, he suffers.

Murdoch dramatizes her point best with the god-like figure of Jesse Baltram. Edward invests his father (whom he has never known) with powers of love and absolution, and makes his spiritual recovery contingent upon Jesse's magic. Ilona sees Jesse as the only one in her life who really loves her. Midge, after one violent embrace from Jesse, hits upon a new theory about whom she really loves. So it happens too with Jesse's public, which buys his paintings and concocts myths of his flamboyant libertinism. Murdoch skillfully teases the reader into thinking of Jesse, as so many others do, as Priapus, as Silenus, as *élan vital*, as the genius of Seegard who (toward the end) may be dead but whose spirit lives in others—surely in Edward? But the truth is that Jesse is Jesse, an old man of flickering energies, somnolent one day, wandering the woods the next, lucid in mind sometimes and tender, but lecherous too and brutally selfish. Not even "god-*like*" will do for Jesse.

Murdoch is by no means a belated existentialist, offering grim lessons in *comment c'est*. Her theme is rather the religious problem of how we survive without God, or a belief in the Good. Both Edward and Stuart in their opposite ways are apprentices in the study of this question. And so is the psychiatrist Thomas, who offers a solution reasonably close to what Murdoch herself may have in mind. Here he mulls over the way his patients turn to him as if he were a spiritual healer:

> But the therapist is not God, not even a priest or a sage, and must prompt the sufferer to heal himself through his own deities, and this involves finding them. How many souls there are who, encountering no good powers, are never healed at all . . . Each person is different, the general idea of "neurosis" a mere hypothesis. Sometimes at least the afflicted have a right to play out the game themselves without drugs or "scientific" mythology. The "myth" that heals is an individual work of art.

The double meaning of that last line (to say nothing of the whole passage) is typical of the meditative richness of Murdoch's novel. It is over-written, unfortunately; over-explained, needlessly detailed, over-controlled. But that need not deter anyone; the book is still strong and fine; Murdoch is Murdoch, one of the best writers alive.

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JAY PARINI

# Irving Babbitt Revisited

> Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free.
>
> —Edmund Burke

> The humanist, then, as opposed to the humanitarian, is interested in the perfecting of the individual rather than in schemes for the elevation of mankind as a whole; and although he allows largely for sympathy, he insists that it be disciplined and tempered by judgment.
>
> —Irving Babbitt

IRVING BABBITT REMAINS THE LEAST UNDERSTOOD CRITIC of his generation. He is rarely thought of any more as other than an important influence on T.S. Eliot, who wrote an essay on his old Harvard professor called "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt" (1927) that was so ponderously muddled he felt compelled to respond to its critics with "Second Thoughts About Humanism" (1929), a reply which only partially dispels the fog swirling over the previous effort. Eliot, like so many critics on either side of the "humanism issue," which occupied a good deal of space in the intellectual journals of the twenties, fixed on one aspect of Babbitt and, in the process, severely misrepresented his intellectual positions.

Babbitt was a conservative thinker in the classic mode of Edmund Burke, whom he revered. In the half a dozen books he published between 1908 and 1932, he returned continuously to the same theme: the crisis of civilization and the need for a revitalized humanism in which the values of "moderation, common sense, and common decency" could assert a "check" on man's errant nature. A dualist at heart, Babbitt stuck doggedly to the ancient Manichean split between good and evil, though he revised the formulation in his own terms: "The true dualism," he wrote, "I take to be the contrast between two wills, one of which is felt as vital impulse (*élan vital*) and the other as vital control (*frein vital*)." He recognized in each man some enduring element that allows him to rise above the Bergsonian flux of existence, placing high value on the intellect as one aspect of the will-as-*frein vital*. Fiercely opposed to the main-

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stream of American intellectual thought represented by his fellow Harvardians, William James and John Dewey, he refused "to shift in the name of sympathy or social justice or on any other ground, the struggle between good and evil from the individual to society." One can see Babbitt's superficial appeal to neoconservative critics today; one of them, Russell Kirk, has written an enthusiastic foreword to a recent reissue of Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership* (1924),[1] a neglected book that represents a lucid extension of his thought into the political realm.

It seems unfortunate that it has taken until now for anyone to write a full-length critical study of Babbitt's intellectual development. Fortunately, Thomas R. Nevin's *Irving Babbitt: An Intellectual Study*[2] is both thorough and astute. Nevin, himself a classicist, has the ideal background for reading Babbitt, who began his studies as a classicist at Harvard, graduating in 1889. He joined the Harvard faculty a few years later as an instructor in French, hoping to sidestep into classics when a position opened up, though he never did. Instead, Babbitt focused largely on French criticism as an academic speciality, publishing his magisterial *Masters of Modern French Criticism*[3] in 1912. As Nevin says, "Babbitt's study and instruction of French letters was less a literary than a psychological or clinical experience, one through which he became a pathologist of French historical culture."

Unlike so many critics since the dawn of the New Criticism, Babbitt was no close reader of literary texts. This has led post-New Critics such as Edmund Wilson, Allen Tate, and R.P. Blackmur, among others, to disparage Babbitt, often relegating him to the so-called Genteel Tradition of American letters. "He never saw afresh in the imaginative field," complains Blackmur in an essay called "Humanism and the Symbolic Imagination." Though we must, finally, see a kind of failure in Babbitt's refusal to engage texts in a sustained way, Blackmur misses the point. Babbitt was just *not* a literary critic in the modern sense of that term. He was something more: a culture critic in the larger, European mode. We do much better to look for models in the Old World: Burke, Matthew Arnold, Joubert, Sainte-Beuve, Lessing, Brunetière—these were the figures whom Babbitt admired and emulated. In fact, his studies of Joubert and, especially, Sainte-Beuve, *are* fine examples of a kind of "close reading."

One sentence from *The Masters* sums up Babbitt's attitude to French criticism: "The French have intelligence and *l'esprit* but lack grounding and piety." His continual interest, as a critic, was in the

[1] DEMOCRACY AND LEADERSHIP, by *Irving Babbitt*. Liberty Classics. $9.00.
[2] IRVING BABBITT: An Intellectual Study, by *Thomas R. Nevin*. University of North Carolina Press. $20.00.
[3] Reprinted by Greenwood Press in 1977.

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restoration—or, really, the establishment—of an inner check, which he identified with humility. To a fanatical extreme, Babbitt reviled Rousseau, whom he would later pick apart at book length in *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919),[4] his most famous book. Rousseau represented all that seemed worst in the world to Irving Babbitt; indeed, he attributed much of what has gone wrong in modern times to that writer's pernicious influence. Rousseau, of course, was one of the fathers of Romanticism, which Babbitt identified with naturalistic sentimentalism. The submission of an entire nation to Rousseau's *volonté générale* was, perhaps rightly, seen by Babbitt as a prefiguration of the modern totalitarian state. The extreme split between "head" and "heart," what Eliot later renamed the "dissociation of sensibility," is also taken back to Rousseau. As Nevin observes, the baleful influence of Rousseau underlies all of Babbitt's various criticisms of French critics from Madame de Staël to Bergson.

*The Masters of Modern French Criticism* is vividly written, a polemic of extraordinary force. Here Babbitt developed a technique of evaluation by contrast that, though occasionally simplistic, is effective. He begins his essay on Joubert, for instance, with this sentence: "If Madame de Staël is the best type of the Rousseauistic enthusiast at the beginning of the nineteenth century, we have in Joubert the representative of a different kind of enthusiasm, the enthusiasm that may be associated with Plato rather than with Rousseau." In other words, he often begins with a left hook. One can easily imagine Babbitt in the classroom and appreciate his influence on generations of Harvard students. One of them, taking issue with certain of Babbitt's ideas, would write:

> Yet to have been once a pupil of Babbitt's was to remain always in that position, and to be grateful always for (in my case) a very qualified approval. . . . If one has once had that relationship with Babbitt, he remains permanently an active influence; his ideas are permanently with one, as a measurement and test of one's own.

That, again, was T.S. Eliot, who would adopt a method and tone in his own critical writings that seems, in retrospect, deeply imitative of Babbitt.

What Babbitt most admired in critics was a talent for self-correction. Sainte-Beuve, for instance, was given to Romantic pessimism and despair, to what Nevin calls "the sinister drifts of his spiritless age." He had swung from Jansenist Catholicism to an extreme form of scientific skepticism—extremes which Babbitt despised. But he admired Sainte-Beuve's ability to make the necessary adjustments when needed: "His perfect tact and measure and good sense can

[4] Reprinted in 1978 by AMS Press.

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always be counted on to put him on his guard against everything that is extreme and one-sided, whether it claims to be ideal or naturalistic." Just as Babbitt was locked in battle with his contemporaries, such as James, Dewey, and Santayana (whom he identified with the "liberal tradition that was ruining Harvard and other elite colleges"), Sainte-Beuve fought off those "wrong-headed prophets" of his day—Comte, Proudhon, and Taine, to name only the French ones. The legitimate negative function of the critic, in Sainte-Beuve's estimation, and as Babbitt repeats with approval, was "to keep mankind as far as possible and in spite of its natural proclivity, from being devoured by charlatans."

While Babbitt has considerable liking for aspects of Sainte-Beuve, Brunetière, and others, he reserves final praise in his *Masters* for—oddly—a German, Goethe. Goethe achieved, in spite of himself (one feels the pressure of Babbitt's own inner conflicts as he writes), a unity of being, a wholeness, that none of the French critics ever managed. Goethe had been drawn to the great devils of Babbitt's imagination, Rousseau and Bacon. Bacon, who figures throughout Babbitt's writing as an opposite extreme to Rousseau, he considers the avatar of scientific skepticism and melioristic progressivism, the forerunner of our modern scientific age, where quantity is all. One can, I think, fault Babbitt on his extreme aversion to science and scientific progress, though he did occasionally—as in *Literature and the American College* (1908)—acknowledge the benefits of science. Unlike Rousseau, Bacon is probably insufficiently weighty as an influence to bear the force of Babbitt's criticism. Yet one can sympathize with Babbitt, who foresaw the threat to humanism and humanistic studies that continues to this day in our universities, where the scientific method has acquired an almost mystical significance. For Babbitt, science (which he took as *scientia* or knowledge) had to be *humanized,* placed within a context of humane studies, to have any meaning at all. Goethe, in Babbitt's estimation, had come to understand these things. He had been first a Rousseauist, then a Baconian. He had, finally, achieved the sacred middle ground. Nevin explains Babbitt's attraction to Goethe: "Like his Faust, Goethe survived everything; unlike Faust's, his own redemption was self-wrought and contained a humanistic insistence upon earthbound virtues, not least of which was the capacity to stand apart from and against one's age."

What seems clear from Nevin's study and my own reading of Babbitt is that, far from being a narrow-minded believer in "the tradition," Babbitt admired a wide-ranging, almost Modernist, eclecticism. In the conclusion to his *Masters,* he wrote: "What we are seeking is a critic who rests his discipline and selection upon the past without being a mere traditionalist; whose holding of tradition involves a constant process of clear and hard thinking, a constant adjustment, in other words, of the experience of the past to the

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changing needs of the present." This strikes me as both more cogent and less pompous than Eliot's similar formulations in *The Sacred Wood,* though—as readers of contemporary post-structuralist and deconstructionist criticism well know—one can do worse.

As a whole, Babbitt's critical writings seem astonishingly consistent. From *Literature and the American College* (1908) to *On Being Creative* (1932), his work forms a unified critique of contemporary culture. As his best friend, Paul Elmer More, once said: "He seems to have sprung up, like Minerva, fully grown and fully armed. No doubt he made vast additions to his knowledge and acquired by practice a deadly dexterity in wielding it, but there is something almost inhuman in the immobility of his central ideas." The resistance successive generations have felt to Babbitt no doubt stems from this blocklike immobility. Like the famous hedgehog of Archilochus, Babbitt had one big idea that he developed in myriad ways. That idea is stated with devastating clarity in the first chapter of his first book, *Literature and the American College,* where he defines "humanism": "The humanist, then, as opposed to the humanitarian, is interested in the perfecting of the individual rather than in schemes for the elevation of mankind as a whole; and although he allows largely for sympathy, he insists that it be disciplined and tempered by judgment." In accord with the Christian tradition (though Babbitt was not a Christian), his program for man's "perfection" was marked not by any program for self-betterment but by a forthright acceptance of human limitations. The need for self-reliance and self-discipline figures crucially in his scheme of appropriate action. Reverence, discipline, wisdom, proportion, decorum, standards: these are the touchstones of his philosophy.

From the beginning, Babbitt found a powerful resonance with his own thought in Oriental philosophy and religion, and these became a lifelong interest. He began his study of Sanskrit and Pāli at Harvard, continuing these studies at the Sorbonne and, later, on his own. One of his last scholarly tasks was a translation from *The Dhammapada,* published posthumously in 1936.[5] Though ostensibly a review of the various strains of Buddhist thought and an examination of the major tenets of that religion, Babbitt's introduction to the volume, as Nevin says, amounts to a personal credo.[6] Nevin states: "His characterizations of Buddha make clear that on several points he saw Buddhism and humanism as one." Always in search of humanist precursors, Babbitt seized upon the Buddha, who, in Babbitt's estimation, was neither a "rationalist" in the Baconian

[5]Oxford University Press, 1936. Reprinted by New Directions in 1965. *The Dhammapada* is a central text of Hinayana Buddhism.

[6]This introduction is reprinted in *Irving Babbitt: Representative Writings,* edited by George A. Panichas (Lincoln, NE, 1981).

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mode, nor a Rousseauistic "emotionalist." Rather, the Buddha was a "religious empiricist" who aimed at a "present blessedness" and eschewed all hankerings after what lies beyond this life on earth.

One of Babbitt's major criticisms of Christianity in its more mystical versions was of its tendency to separate daily life from the pursuit of the ineffable. He felt that religion ought to maintain close ties with "the scene of our sorrow . . . the concrete and the human." Buddhism appeared to offer a solution to this separation, one of the oldest problems of Western civilization. Furthermore, the transformation of the historical Siddhartha into the Enlightened One, the Buddha, afforded humankind a suitable paradigm for spiritual attainment through concentration of the will. The Buddha's legendary powers of discrimination appealed strongly to Babbitt, as did the meticulous tracing of cause and effect typical of Buddhist thinking. In this essay, which is one of his finest, Babbitt praises the Buddha's "firm intellectual grasp, joined to a dominant and unwavering purpose," to which he attributed the Buddha's "effect of authority." One passage, which sketches in a portrait of the Buddhist sage, struck deep sympathetic chords in the heart of its translator:

> The wise man who fares strenuously apart,
> Who is unshaken in the midst of praise or blame,
> Even as a lion that trembles not at noises,
> Or as the wind that is not caught in a net,
> Or as the lotus that is unstained by the water—
> A leader of others and not by others led,
> Him verily the discerning proclaim to be a sage.

Though attracted to the Buddha, Babbitt would seem to have more in common with Confucius, with his concern for the internal check, his emphasis on ethics, his turning away from otherworldly matters. The practice of the Golden Mean exists in Buddhism, of course, but it was central to Confucianism. Buddhism was always a bit too transcendental for Irving Babbitt, though one sees him acknowledge the importance of "grace," especially, in his later writings (and grace, presumably, depends on a supernatural realm). Scattered references to Confucius do occur throughout Babbitt's writing, but he never devoted as much as a whole essay to the great Chinese sage, whose philosophy turned on the issues of self-restraint and self-governance so dear to him.

While Babbitt's immobility, his typically Victorian overvaluation of the power of the sage to transform society, and his occasionally reductive manner rub severely against the contemporary grain, he remains a figure to whom we ought periodically to return to school for doses of good sense and inspiration. His critique of modern culture, *mutatis mutandis,* remains persuasive. If anything, the condi-

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tions of disintegration which he isolated in the early part of this century have only worsened. The ideal humanist, whom Babbitt proposed, seems even more remote than he or she did in Babbitt's day. And our critics, far from speaking to the educated portion of their society, have withdrawn into the academy with a ferocity no one in previous decades of this century could have predicted. Criticism has lost its Arnoldian mission to "see life steadily and see it whole," a phrase Babbitt admired. He was also fond of quoting another remark by Arnold: "What the Americans most urgently require is a steady exhibition of cool and sane criticism." For nearly three decades, Babbitt supplied this cool and sane writing. One cringes to think what he, or Arnold, would make of the situation of criticism now.

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JEFFERSON HUNTER

# Troubles Overcome Are Good to Tell

PRIMO LEVI'S FIRST BOOK described his imprisonment and survival in Monowitz-Auschwitz, a *Lager* for IG Farbenindustrie slave-laborers close by the more famous death camp of Auschwitz and only marginally less horrible than it. *If This Is a Man* (1947) was written partly out of Levi's guilt at surviving, at having been educated enough and lucky enough to avoid the selections for the gas ovens. (A chemist, he was put to work in a warm laboratory, where he stole valuables he could exchange for food; later, when the Red Army was advancing to the gates of the camp, scarlet fever saved him from removal to Germany.) It seemed to Levi he would be purified if he told the story, and purified he was, but he was not finished with recounting his wartime experiences. *The Reawakening* (1963) followed him into Russia with his well-intentioned if disorganized and forgetful Soviet liberators, then traced his return with a handful of other Italian survivors through Romania, Hungary, and Austria to the Brenner Pass and home. This is a book about rediscovering the will to live while not forgetting the deaths of the past, and like all of Levi's subsequent writings it suggests that the way to accomplish that difficult double task is to preserve certain individual histories, like that of Frau Vitta ("Vita," meaning "life," to all the Italians), who tended the dying and then danced by herself between the bunks, to the sound of her own songs, clasping an imaginary partner to her breast; or that of the gifted mimic Cesare, who a few weeks after recovering from dysentery was selling shirts to Polish peasants in a mixture of Roman ghetto slang and extravagant displays of affection for his goods.

The Yiddish saying *Ibergekumene tsores iz gut tsu dertseylin* appears in Levi's two most recent books, the memoir *The Periodic Table* (1984) and the novel *If Not Now, When?* (1985). Troubles overcome are good to tell because they please listeners and simultaneously teach them something practical about the art of overcoming despair. *If Not Now, When?* fictionalizes Levi's own return from Russia to Italy and from apathy to life.[1] Its hero Mendel ben Nachman is when first glimpsed (the date is July 1943) hiding in a Russian for-

[1] IF NOT NOW, WHEN? by *Primo Levi*. Translated by *William Weaver*, introduction by *Irving Howe*. Summit Books. $15.95.

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est. Separated from his Red Army unit by the German armies and his own "yearning for a white, serene nothingness, like a winter snowfall," he is content to spend the rest of the war minding his own business. But accidents start him moving west, away from his weariness, which is as Levi notes the "thousand-year-old weariness" of all the Jews in the *shtetl*. His safe hiding place is discovered, a fellow Jew turns up to be his traveling companion, and finally Mendel plays chess with a chance-met Uzbek, in the process feeling himself the "champion of something or someone." He savors his victory specifically as a Jew, who in "cleverness and patience" not only protects his own king but carries war into the enemy's camp. In the series of partisan bands which Mendel now joins—a "republic" of Jews hidden away in the marshes, a more regular Soviet *kommando* complete with NKVD officer and underground barracks, a ragged company led by the fiddle-playing and machine-pistol–toting Jew Gedaleh—he senses this Jewish pride ever more strongly. Each act of sabotage asserts that Jews can fight; every decision taken refutes the charge that "you people always reason too much."

Not that the acts themselves are spectacular. Mendel and his comrades damage a train slightly, sabotage a German airdrop, and kill the six guards at a labor camp. In fact *If Not Now, When?* is mostly about waiting or arriving too late at the scene of a defeat. *Partisanshchina*, the lack of discipline in partisan bands, their general fecklessness, always threatens, until finally the "Gedalists" keep themselves going only by the thought that they are leaving Europe for good. The war ends, their homes in Russia are destroyed, the long finger of Italy points south across the Mediterranean: they will emigrate to Palestine. On the train across the Alps, Gedaleh's beloved fiddle suddenly falls apart, symbolizing the break with old Europe (and with the tradition of Jews as fiddlers, entertainers?), but not before having played a folksong ("brisk, almost a march") quoting Rabbi Hillel,

> If I'm not for myself, who will be for me?
> If not this way, how? And if not now, when?

and sending them all away from "the Europe of graves":

> Let us climb together toward the land
> Where we will be men among men.

The Zionist theme in Levi's novel is simply expressed. So is Mendel's character; so is the developing story of his love for Line, the fervent young partisan named after Emmeline Pankhurst. What is not so simply expressed is the mood of certain moments on the journey westward, when the partisans are caught and held between the past and the future. Mendel's band spends two summer months of 1944 hiding in a Polish village, reaping its fields of rye, restoring

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its chicken coops (all the young men of the place have long ago been lost to the fighting or the labor battalions). The partisans hide their Jewishness for the duration and get along well with the peasants. One evening, though, as Poles and Jews gather in the darkness to eat potatoes, the mayor of the village admits that he knows who they are, and admits everything that has kept Jews and Christians apart: the Jews' role in gathering rents, the strangeness of their eyes, what the village priest says from his pulpit . . . Line ventures a Popular Front, our-enemies-are-your-enemies response, but the mayor rightly answers that things with them "aren't that simple." Nor are things with the partisans "that simple"; they are Jews and they are Russians, says Gedaleh. They would like to go back to their homes but know their homes have been destroyed. They look forward and they can never forget. Into the silence of the night there comes from some unspecified point, perhaps from many points, the subdued rumble of the front, "full of hope and menace," and this rare moment of multiple perspectives and conflicting emotions ends with the comment of the mayor: "I'm glad I met you. I'm glad you harvested for us. I'm glad I talked with you the way a man speaks with friends, but I'm also glad you're going away."

In *The Periodic Table* Levi chiefly writes fact—episodes from the history of his career in chemistry—rather than fiction.[2] But *The Periodic Table* is a more freely imagined book than *If Not Now, When?*, its language richer and more inventive, its scenes more satisfactorily contrived. Reality, Levi comments, "is always more complex than invention: less kempt, cruder, less rounded out," and the writer must approach its complexities with an art like that of the chemical analyst, who weighs and divides, measures and judges. Confronting reality, Levi feels the complex, intense pleasure of the student "penetrating the solemn order of differential calculus," and in fact *The Periodic Table* does justice to a world even fuller of multiple perspectives than mathematics or wartime experience, with its gunfire symbolic of menace and hope. In the chapter "Vanadium," for example, Levi discovers that the imperturbable German chemist to whom he has been writing business letters is the same Dr. Müller whom he met in the laboratory at Monowitz–Auschwitz. When Levi points out their common history and asks for a comment on the morality of IG Farbenindustrie's wartime enterprises, Müller responds not with a "humble, warm, Christian letter" from a redeemed German, nor with a "ribald, proud, glacial letter" from an obdurate Nazi, but with a letter full of digressions and farfetched praises, clumsy exculpations and half–sincere apologies. A long–winded version of the mayor in *If Not Now, When?*, Müller finds that things between Christians and Jews (or between past and present) aren't that simple.

"Vanadium" is one of the book's many excursions into painful

[2] THE PERIODIC TABLE, by *Primo Levi*. Translated by *Raymond Rosenthal*. Schocken. $16.95.

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memories. Levi notes how Mussolini's racial laws kept professors from accepting him as an assistant; he movingly recalls Sandro Delmastro, the fellow-student who taught him mountain-climbing and later died at the hands of Fascist partisans. But none of these stories is strident, self-pitying, or oversimplified. Levi is protected from the vices of memory by his style, which is precise and speculative at the same time. He tells us that zinc is yielding to acid except when very pure, hence, generalizing, that impurity gives rise to changes, "in other words, to life." That is why Fascism cannot tolerate impurity or dissension, because it wants everybody to be the same. The Levi who cannot find a professor to sponsor him is the impurity that makes the zinc react. These chemical symbolisms are endlessly multiplied, in serious and comic applications. Iron stands for the strong–willed Sandro, whereas argon, a noble or inert gas, gives the clue to Levi's standoffish and spiritually inert Turinese ancestors, whose ingenious dialect he lovingly describes. Much of *The Periodic Table*, indeed, is comic. That in itself is an achievement: a book full of wit by an author who after World War II might well have thought nothing laughable. Polyethylene, Levi says, is "a bit too incorruptible," and not by chance God Almighty, although "a master of polymerization," has abstained from patenting it: He does not like incorruptible things. Views of the divine chemical plant alternate with ironic meditations on the human scene. The gangsterish owner of a lipstick factory thinks that a certain compound, alloxan, might turn lips *permanently* red; he sends Levi chasing after alloxan; and Levi discovers that it may be derived from uric acid, found abundantly in bird and reptile droppings. For a moment, in Levi's imagination, ladies' lips are touched with the excrement of chickens or pythons, and his heart is warmed by a return to the origins of his science, when alchemists extracted phosphorus from urine.

Levi's comic style is highly original. It entails persistent self-deprecation, bravura comparisons ("a curious, narrow, twisting alleyway which branched off Piazza della Crocetta and stood out in the obsessive Turinese geometry like a rudimentary organ trapped in the evolved structure of a mammalian"), and subtle allusiveness. Like all educated Italians Levi had Dante force-fed to him in the *liceo*, so there is perhaps nothing very distinctive about his parallel between an open-pit mine and the encircling tiers of Hell, nor even about his offhand comment that a ponderous rolling shutter stood at the bottom of the mine, "in Lucifer's place." What *is* distinctive is Levi's description of the locomotive in the mine, by which he carries us away from *The Divine Comedy* only to bring us wittily and delicately back: the locomotive "positioned the cars one by one under the shutter so that they could be filled, then dragged them out to look again at the stars." One could say a good deal about Levi and Dante. He uses the poet, as here, to expand a perspective, and elsewhere to define the meaning of humane culture. In the most moving episode of his concentration camp book, *If This Is a Man*, Levi

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quotes from rusty memory the twenty-sixth canto of the *Inferno* as he and a fellow inmate go to fetch their midday soup. Like the Ulysses of that canto, Levi is subject to the will of Another but not finally held in bondage, being free in his mind, free to assert his humanity. In *The Periodic Table* Levi remembers also that Dante was not without a certain prejudice, and pointed a Christian finger at the Jew, who "in your midst laughs at you."

The open-pit mine features in "Nickel," one of the autobiographical vignettes of *The Periodic Table*. Other chapters are historical fables ("Lead," "Mercury"), more or less realistic short stories ("Sulfur," "Titanium"), or tales of chemical investigation ("Chromium," "Silver," "Nitrogen") somewhat resembling Berton Roueché's annals of medical detection in *The New Yorker*. It is apparent that the book lacks one kind of unity, though it has the unities of a marked personal style and of a structural conceit—all those elemental titles set forthrightly down in emulation of Mendeleev's Periodic Table, the lofty and solemn poetry of which Levi admired as a young chemistry student. The Table and the book are poetic because they impose order on stupid matter and meaningless experience. They struggle against an adversary "slothfully hostile as human stupidity is hostile, and like it strong because of its obtuse passivity." In this war every accurate qualitative analysis marks a victory. So does every understanding of motive or speculation into a mystery. What is the fate of a single carbon atom? That mystery is investigated in Levi's last chapter, which follows the smallest unit of organic matter from a limestone ledge and a lime kiln to the sky, and thence to a grapevine, a bottle of wine, and a breathing human being. Exhaled as part of a molecule of carbon dioxide, the atom is absorbed by a tree and allowed to form wood, then swallowed by a woodworm, then freed by decay and swept into the air again. Finally it settles in a glass of milk which Levi himself drinks. It enters a cell:

> This cell belongs to my brain, and it is my brain, the brain of the *me* who is writing; and the cell in question, and within it the atom in question, is in charge of my writing, in a gigantic minuscule game which nobody has yet described. It is that which at this instant, issuing out of a labyrinthine tangle of yeses and nos, makes my hand run along a certain path on the paper, mark it with these volutes that are signs: a double snap, up and down, between two levels of energy, guides this hand of mine to impress on the paper this dot, here, this one.

It is an extraordinary passage at the end of an extraordinary book, a bringing together of imagination and science, of liking for human beings in their labyrinthine tangles and admiration for chemistry in its exactness, such as has marked every production of an outstanding career.

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MARK JARMAN

# Singers and Storytellers

I AM NOT GOING TO ASSUME THAT YOU TRUST or distrust my good taste as a reviewer of the following twelve books of poetry. I chose them because I have a special interest in them; the poetry written by these poets represents, more or less, a contemporary opposition that compels me—that between the lyric and the narrative. It is my suspicion that the lyric is either exhausted as a genre of poetry or is undergoing a necessary revitalization but in some very different directions. One direction seeks to destroy even the syntactic coherence that narrative cannot exist without, so that the consequential underpinnings of the lyric poem itself are kicked out. The other direction is toward more, not less, narrativity.

My title suggests a recognition of temperaments and, since I believe in the primacy, not the death, of the author, I wish to recognize individuality. I do not want to condemn or to praise because of distaste or preference, although I clearly am more excited by the possibilities of narrative in poetry than the destruction of continuity and genre and self. The act of writing poetry is still, to paraphrase Elizabeth Bishop, one of the most backward industries in the world; the poem is still a handmade thing, signed by its maker. That this tradition, coming to us at the very latest from the Renaissance, is under attack is something to take quite seriously.

It is difficult to say how Leslie Scalapino wants to apply the word *aeolotropic* which she uses to describe the title poem of her latest book.[1] Are we to take it as an expression of its Greek root, meaning "variegated"? That meaning offers a great deal of latitude. Yet the technological slant of much of the Language School of poets, of which Scalapino seems to be a member, suggests that this series may also be taken as *anisotropic*, like "crystals that exhibit properties with different values when measured along axes in different directions," according to *Webster's*, or "anything that assumes different positions in response to external stimuli." Finally, although only one of the four poems included in this book is called an aeolotropic series, since its title is the book's title, are we then to take all four of the poems as variegated series of one sort or another?

In fact, the poetry of Leslie Scalapino, though much of it is in prose blocks, is like the poetry of the Language School generally;

[1] THAT THEY WERE AT THE BEACH, by *Leslie Scalapino*. North Point Press. $9.50.

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that is, it is a form of the lyric. Despite the critical opinion of Marjorie Perloff that the Language School buys into the death of the author and, furthermore, despite the apparent Derridean blurring of genres in assuming that Scalapino's paragraphs are poetry (not a new idea, anyway), there is still a central intelligence in her poetry which speaks with a lyric voice. Associations in her poems are with childhood and adolescence, sexuality, often faceless but lyrically repetitive; and though the emotion may be so subdued as to seem stoned or disoriented by protective apathy, emotion is the key. The fragmentation of the writing itself, often imageless and flat and redundant, provides the very chinks that allow us a partial view. What is most fascinating is how often Scalapino seems to choose not to show us anything interesting. Lest this sound like a circumspect way of saying this poetry is boring, I would hasten to add that her previous book from North Point, *Considering how exaggerated music is*, which stylistically has much in common with this new one, also is more interesting. In it, even the use of titles from the first line of prose paragraphs has an original wit that teases both the reader's expectations and typography itself; the narrative situations that do appear are more clearly delineated, too ("Driving down to Los Angeles a man who was in the lane on the freeway beside me began talking to me out his window"), and they are often funny, off the wall, and real. It takes an effort of good will to read and enjoy most of the writing in *that they were at the beach*. Personally, I believe it is an effort Scalapino's work deserves, but I must expose my traditional prejudices by saying that I prefer the section called "A Sequence" which seems to be a parable of sexuality built around an irreducible symbol, in this case that of the leopard, a motif familiar from Eliot's "Ash Wednesday."

The gorgeous repetitions of his blank verse lines and the expensive Proustian landscapes, even of his persona poems, are characteristic of Herbert Morris' poetry. Two of the twelve poems in his new book[2] are in the voices of personae. In one Freud recalls his friendship with the notorious Fliess; in the other the fiancée of a frequently absent ship's captain reveals to her father that she has taken a young hired man for her lover. The rest of the poems, though they seem narrative at first, become lyrically repetitive, fixed in time, and are meant to be heartbreaking as song rather than story.

Despite its clarity and coherence, Morris' project is much like Scalapino's, except that his repetition is of conventional syntactical units, clauses that we understand modify a clear but sometimes distant referent. The referent in Scalapino's writing is part of its enigma—to what is she referring? Where Scalapino can give a kind of dizzying pleasure through disorientation, Morris does so through baroque elaboration. When both poets fail, it is because they satiate

[2] DREAM PALACE, by *Herbert Morris*. Harper & Row. $16.95; $8.95.

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the reader; as one gets lost in Scalapino one gets bored; as one sees a single image enhanced and elaborated yet remain static—a photograph or photographic memory—one wonders why Morris must go on.

The lyric, it seems to me, builds emotion through repetition. The narrative builds it through plot. The passions present in Morris are in part nostalgic. The first poems in his book depict his parents, then the poems go back even further in history, then they come forward to the childhood and youth of the poet, and end in the present. There is something of this in Scalapino, too, expressed in the title of her book and in its subject matter, if we can call it that. Repetition in Scalapino works as different angles or axes of measurement; in other words, as just what she says or means by "aeolotropic." In Morris, it is a hypertrophy of the lyric, going to extraordinary lengths to be inclusive, to grow out into all the possibilities of a single emotion. Length, which is associated with narrative in poetry, is then a kind of illusion in Morris, much as prose, which is associated with clarity, is in Scalapino. But the passion each shares is nostalgia, too. The possible subjunctive tense of Scalapino's title implies a wished-for condition; the symbolically resonant title of Morris' book hints at the wish fulfillment of the cinema. The location of emotion in the case of both poets, as it is with all lyric poets, is in the presence of a thinking and feeling human being represented on paper by words. And when there are only words, in the lyric mode, then the absence makes the poetry barren, jejune.

That the lyric poet has only himself or herself for company has been the cause for much discomfort for a while now, and can be seen, naturally, in some of the formations of the language, even in a young poet like Matthew Graham and his accomplished first book.[3] *Someone*'s, *you*'s, *somewhere*'s, *something*'s, *sometimes*, all these unspecified pronouns abound in Graham's poems. This lack of specificity has been pointed out before as endemic to our poetry, and is certainly not so much a flaw of Graham's poetry as a symptom of a larger disease. Leslie Scalapino's puzzling referents, I believe, are similar. It is, in other words, not so much that the lyric poet has suddenly discovered that he or she is all alone with these strong feelings but that the primacy of the self seems in doubt, too. What Mary Kinzie has called a shadow self must be constructed, which really is nothing more than a persona, a Yeatsian mask.

Matthew Graham's mask is as something of (note my own vagueness) an itinerant; this person has come from farm stock and has worked in many places and ways, always laboring, on barges or on the roofs of houses, and takes his leisure in bars. Wistful and witty, he is nobody's fool, and saves some of his most moving language

[3] NEW WORLD ARCHITECTURE, by *Matthew Graham*. The Galileo Press. $6.50; $4.50.

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for his father, and for his lovers, too, though often indirectly. The single most successful lyric in the volume, a sestina called "California," speaks of a woman who "used to practice patience by making me wait."

The two most compelling poems in the book, though perhaps not the most successful, are "To a Friend Killed in the Fighting: Dominican Republic, 1965" and "Translation." Both take foreign places at war as settings; the latter takes Saigon after the evacuation in 1975. In the former, as if talking to him in his head, a guerrilla explains his situation to his dead friend as he waits to ambush a convoy of U. S. Marines. The otherness of his experience, the warmth of the friendship he recalls and its legacy—the rifle in his hands—even the slightly florid language ("The black night is so long it could be the wind"), all are moving and make the poem almost too intimate, almost embarrassing in its exposure of emotion. "Translation" is written in the voice of a translator who assists a journalist—nationality unspecified in both cases—in greeting the North Vietnamese as they roll into Saigon. The queerness of a tank commander stopping to ask the journalist for directions to Doc Lap Palace and the memory of a woman the translator knew at the palace are compared to make a statement on the inevitability of change. Again, it is the strangeness of place and action in the poem that sets it apart from the lyrics of the rest of the volume. What I am saying is that with the exhaustion of emotion in the lyric self and its expression, a poet like Graham, coming through the door of the persona poem (like Morris), finds a new power in narrative structure. Yet it should be possible to find this power without recourse to the persona poem.

Elizabeth Spires's lyric poetry in her second book[4] is, at times, profoundly touching in the way it echoes the more traditional yet still modern music of a poet like Edna St. Vincent Millay. Here is the opening of the beautiful love poem, "Two Shadows."

> When we are shadows watching over shadows,
> when years have passed, enough to live
> two lives, when we have passed
> through love and come out speechless
> on the other side, I will remember
> how we spent a night, walking the streets
> in August, side by side . . .

This is not at all to say she sounds old-fashioned, only to praise the risk in composing such unequivocal music. This lyricism is present in a number of short poems, including "Angel," "The Falling," "My Daughter," "Bread & Water," and "Song of Renunciation"; none of

[4] SWAN'S ISLAND, by *Elizabeth Spires*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. $8.95 p.

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these has quite the lilt of "Two Shadows," however. All do show the necessary compression required by the lyric and the emotional exposure of the self that makes the lyric work.

What is curious about Spires's poetry is that much of it in this volume displays the greater discursiveness sometimes associated with narrativity. Certainly this, and a sense of others, helps Matthew Graham break the lyric habit. I am not altogether sure that Spires improves at length, even though she is always competent and intelligent. The long "Storyville Portraits" based on E. J. Belloq's photographs, neither fish nor fowl, neither lyric nor narrative, exists in that shadow genre we might call meditative poetry, like much contemporary poetry that treats aesthetic subject matter. "Ever-Changing Landscape" about the Ladew topiary gardens in Monkton, Maryland, is similar. At this many removes from experience, lyric poetry tends to be overlong and sententious.

The contradiction to these claims is that the very best poem in the book is the four-page-long title poem, "Letter from Swan's Island." Whoever the speaker of this piece of magic is, I, for one, would not have minded if she had taken up the entire volume. I have had this feeling reading a poet like Elizabeth Bishop, too, who possibly is the presiding spirit of the poem.

> Some mornings I wake too suddenly,
> the light on the wall
> brilliant and unfamiliar, and wonder
> for a moment, where am I?
> I answer myself, my disembodied voice
> high and far off
> like what I imagine saints and martyrs
> heard in moments of ecstasy: *Swan's Island.*

On this island, the isolated narrator considers how "love struggles to perfect / itself, and finally perfect, / finds it has no object." The solemn whimsicality of the poem, with its serious understanding of this very dilemma, is addressed to the problem of the lyric poet in our time. With a perfected form in hand, on what object shall the poet apply it, besides language itself? Elizabeth Spires is a valuable poet because she understands this problem. Like Matthew Graham, she attempts to solve the problem through greater narrativity.

Louise Glück is arguably the foremost lyric poet of her generation, and the title of her fourth book[5] does make a certain claim, with its neoclassical ring, imaginable as a title for a painting by David. But Achilles' triumph, and Glück's triumph too it must be added, is to be, despite demi-godhead, "a victim / of the part that loved, / the part that was mortal." The book begins and ends with two rather petulant responses to mortality. "Mock Orange" tells us

[5] THE TRIUMPH OF ACHILLES, by *Louise Glück*. Ecco Press. $13.50.

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about flowers in a moonlit yard, "I hate them. / I hate them as I hate sex, / the man's mouth / sealing my mouth, / the man's paralyzing body—." And "Horse," which concludes the volume, reproaches the lover for his animal nature, his relationship with a horse, and ends, "What is the animal / if not passage out of this life?"

At her best Glück is what might be called an academic poet in that many of her poems are literary. "Mythic Fragment," "Hyacinth," "The Triumph of Achilles" and "The Mountain" all allude to classical myths. "Winter Morning" and "Day Without Night" are meditations on Christ and Moses, respectively. The landscape of many of her poems is classical in another sense, too; it is the psychoanalytical landscape of dreams and its painterly neoclassicism is de Chirico's rather than David's: "I had come to a strange city, / without belongings: / in the dream it was your city, I was looking for you. / Then I was lost, on a dark street lined with fruit stands . . . / Then I was on a boulevard, in brilliant sunlight."

In the poem the preceding passage is taken from, part 6 of "Marathon" called "The Beginning," Glück offers us this piece of dreamwork: "Then what began as love for you / became a hunger for structure." Is dream, as it so often is in Glück's poetry, structure enough with its odd narrative twists? She has made it so in the past, most notably in *House on Marshland*, still her finest book. What was a characteristic of that book, but only a minor one, was that along with the imagistic language and the compressed free verse was a hint of discursiveness, a willingness to let mere talk carry weight. In "Pomegranate," Hades seduced shy Persephone memorably, saying, "examine / this grief your mother / parades over our heads / remembering / that she is one to whom / these depths were not offered." Now that discursiveness not only predominates in a form not made for it, but often becomes persiflage, as in "Metamorphosis" about the death of her father: "Once, for the smallest / fraction of an instant, I thought / he was alive in the present again."

On the other hand, as contemporary poetry grows more discursive, in the narrative and meditative modes, Glück's condensed lyrics are beginning to seem less and less fashionable and, perhaps, more to be prized for their individuality. It is odd, but their address to matters of love and birth and mortality is being better handled at this time by a poet like Sharon Olds, whose charged up, often headlong and even redundant imagery makes Glück's seem cautious, though more artful.

Where Louise Glück's world is the dream, James Schuyler's, in his latest book,[6] is the waking life. So wide awake is Schuyler that he even tells us of a sleepless night and the roil of associations that pass through his head, crazily but consciously. Schuyler tells the reader everything he can think of, believing that in "the mess" is "all this beauty." He does not hunger for structure in the least;

[6] A FEW DAYS, by *James Schuyler*. Random House. $14.95; $8.95.

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there seems to be no inner censor or editor; everything goes into the poetry, distinguished, it appears, only by the poet's taste for the names of flowers, friends, and musical compositions. Of all members of the New York School, Schuyler is still given to what his friend and contemporary Frank O'Hara called "the I-do-this, I-do-that poem." His poetry is a diary of daily life, and the name-dropping he does, offputting to some, is a part of that life and no longer seems to be making any inordinate claims, but simply to be documenting and rounding out a personality.

The poetry doesn't make much of a claim on the reader, either. One does not read it with a wrinkled brow, as one reads Glück, patient or impatient to receive wisdom through the slow exposure of the images. Schuyler throws the shade up and the door open and lets light and air flood in on everything and anything.

> Because of the coolness in the air,
> because of the henna in your hair
> (it turned it orange, boy)
> because of Helena's perky boobs,
> because of Tom's insouciant buns
> (M. is really gone on them),
> I would like to celebrate today.
>
> "The Day"

By the end of *A Few Days* one seems to know quite a bit about Schuyler's everyday life and thus his life generally: the French doors of his apartment in New York City, his frustrated attraction to his assistant Tom, his insomnia, his fight with alcoholism and mental illness, his preference for Romantic music over Baroque, his cologne, his opinions about friends like Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery ("John is devoted to the impossible"), how many pills he takes before he goes to sleep at night, his brother's family, his mother's death. The title poem is set off by itself, loosely structured around his mother's final illness and death, but filled as is the rest of the book with Schuyler's commonplace, diaristic lyricism. Schuyler is so forthright he makes Allen Ginsberg sound literary. I think of the opening of John Ashbery's prose poem "The New Spirit": "I thought that if I could put it all down, that would be one way. And next the thought came to me that to leave all out would be another, and truer, way."

Schuyler chooses the first way. Nevertheless, peeking through all the newsprint and flowers and chit-chat is a genuine human being in a good deal of pain, somebody wide awake and feeling an inner pressure that makes him pettishly quibble with himself about how much cologne he will wear or whether rum cake will activate his Antabuse. Schuyler's poetry is the opposite of Glück's temperamentally, but both her constriction and his explosion may mark an end, a need for something new, in the lyric.

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John Ashbery has, at last, published a volume of selected poems.[7] Formally, Ashbery has been very well understood; no one has improved on David Shapiro's *Urgent Masks*, but I do not believe even Harold Bloom knows what the poet is saying, if indeed he is saying anything. Ashbery's approach is much like James Schuyler's; he does put everything in, but most of it is abstract, symbolic, and the terms keep changing as an apparent lyric or narrative or meditative line of reasoning develops, so that he seems to be leaving everything out. For Bloom, Ashbery is the poet who claims, "We are happy in our way of life." For the rest of us, Ashbery adds, "It doesn't make much sense to others." I will not pretend to let anyone know what Ashbery is talking about throughout this handsome book, only that my experience of reading it straight through, having already read the books from which it was selected, was totally unlike James Fenton's, reported in *The New York Times Book Review*. I was not reduced to tears of boredom. Lying on a couch, reading steadily but without undue concentration, I let the poetry come in waves and concluded that one could describe it *only* in formal terms.

First of all, Ashbery is a magician of metaphor, especially when the object is humor: "I only slipped on the cake of soap of the air / and drowned in the bathtub of the world." The poem "37 Haiku," selected from *A Wave*, might just be what we search for in the larger bodies of the others. Its lines seem to have been flensed from the warm blubber of the big poems: "A child must go down it must stand and last," "The dreams descend like cranes on gilded, forgetful wings," "What is the past, what is it all for? A mental sandwich?"

In larger terms, I would call Ashbery a narrative poet *manqué*. The two best poems from his first book, "The Instruction Manual" and "Illustration," create a setting and characters, and though the former is without event and the latter is basically a lyric, the point is that a narrative structure is essential to both of them. Ashbery knows this; there is no more cunning poet writing; his voice has the persuasive dreamy divagation of hypnagogic imagery.

> And meanwhile my story goes well
> The first chapter
> endeth
> But the real story, the one
> They tell us we shall probably never know
> Drifts back in bits and pieces
> All of them, it turns out
> "Oleum Misericordium"

It is not surprising that Ashbery is the preeminent poet of our moment; he is the poet Modernism has been headed for (nor is it surprising that he is to the Language School what W. C. Williams was

[7] SELECTED POEMS, by *John Ashbery*. Viking. $22.95.

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to the Black Mountain poets). The pleasure of his poetry is the deep, dazzling murk of it, as one finds in W. H. Auden's "Caliban to the Audience"; Ashbery also shows an overdevelopment of Auden's schoolboy precociousness. We should buy this book and rediscover it years hence and understand what we had come to. Till then, like children listening to a conversation that doesn't concern them, we *are* likely to be bored, albeit pleasantly.

It is significant that Evan Connell's companion volume[8] to his classic *Notes Found in a Bottle on the Beach at Carmel* has also been reissued, for like its predecessor, it appears to be a book-length narrative poem but its fragmentation may be the only sort of narrative acceptable to readers of poetry in the age of Ashbery. Actually, the book is a box of mind candy. One can alight anywhere among its 240 pages and find mostly fascinating comments on the vanity of human wishes, Connell's theme.

Page 11:

> We suspect giantesses live beneath the sea,
> just as we know dragons wait in grave mounds
> and Valkyries eat corpses on battlefields.

Page 88:

> Bohemond's warriors ate the flesh of Turks,
> declaring it tastier than spiced peacock.
> This, too, has contemporary reverberations.

Page 44:

> Arabs compare women to camels, and say they are graceful
> hideous creatures with magic in their way of walking.

Page 132:

> Andromeda's stars aren't important, but opposite Mirach
> is the Great Nebula, probably larger than the Milky Way,
> visible as a hazy speck so faint that in order to see it
> we must look a little aside.

Page 190:

> I would say I resemble the King of Tsin at whose order
> the Great Wall was begun, who decreed that every book
> composed before his time be destroyed.

I chose these passages at random, in full faith that I would be able to find exemplary ones. This is a syndetic work and to explain the

[8] POINTS FOR A COMPASS ROSE, by *Evan Connell.* North Point Press. $12.50 p.

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meaning of "syndetic" let me quote David Robertson quoting R. P. Armstrong in "The Book of Proverbs" from the Winter 1986 issue of this magazine.

> Syndesis . . . proceeds by "accretion" and "repetition," "accumulation" and "proliferation." Whereas synthetic works of art are "consequential," syndetic ones are "sequential."

Even sequence might be misunderstood with respect to this work. Yet there is a trope supported at intervals through the book that we are aboard a ship; readings of latitude and longitude turn up; perhaps, we are reading a ship's log. Thus, the poem may be seen as Archibald MacLeish's "Letter to Be Left in the Earth" writ enormously large. It is also like a novel made up entirely of the narrator's digressions, rhapsodies instead of episodes, poetry instead of plot. Connell himself calls it "a song for a single voice. A monody." On page 224 the poet finally comments.

> Look. I appreciate your impatience
> with what must seem intolerably circuitous;
> it's just that affairs of supreme urgency
> like root-bound plants send out tentacles
> in a dozen directions.

One of the directions is a Paul Krasnerian intrigue with conspiracy.

> Perhaps you know this, but an unspecified quantity
> of a gas designated "G-B" has been manufactured.
> Theoretically, 300 gallons would be enough
> to blot out one billion people.

But a dozen directions? That is either two few or too many.

How then is a book-length narrative poem to be written nowadays? Examples do exist, but their appearance is separated by years rather than months. Most recently there is Alfred Corn's *Notes from a Child of Paradise*, and some would include James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*. The last major book-length narrative poem to raise the problem of what form such a poem is to take was George Keithley's *The Donner Party* in 1972. Nobody has seemed to have trouble with Corn's or Merrill's poems on that score; they are traditional formalists. One of *The Donner Party*'s harshest critics, James Dickey, argued that the poem lacked rhythm and original imagery and figures of speech; for him, these are essential elements of form.

Daryl Hine and Frederick Turner have given us two book-length narrative poems that say a lot about how narrative poetry is currently conceived. Besides the fact that both are, in the end, quite readable, they also have historical importance.

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For all its science-fiction prose and phoney behavior of characters (an over solicitousness for feminine propriety, for example, especially with regard to obscene language), for all its space opera and pseudo-medieval mores, which we are to assume we will return to after the apocalypse and the oil wells run dry, for all its pretentious mixing of traditional myths and legends, including Siegfried and Brünnhilde, Sohrab and Rustum, Arjuna and Krishna, Odysseus and Nausicaa, Arthur and Modred, Adam and Eve, and finally even the Jonestown mass suicides, for all this machinery to present us a single warrior-savior, an Oedipus as Christ, Frederick Turner's epic poem[9] is quite a read, absorbing and atrocious, tasteless and tactless, bloodcurdling and inconsistent (the invented language and coinages of the recent post-apocalypse novel *Riddley Walker* are more successful). There are moments that make a reader wince, but times, too, when one is in the presence of real epic poetry and feels what the first auditors of Homer may have felt.

Yet the adrenalin that gets pumping through the vascular reader at the climactic end of *The New World* is no different than that secreted by reading a fast-paced potboiler. The so-called prosody Turner claims to be following really isn't demonstrable. The characterizations are often ludicrous, especially the retro-Nigger Jim speech of the Kingfish, the Krishna-like presiding deity over the poem's final internecine battle. Still, if we are to have a resurgence of narrative poetry, then a work like this should have a place in it, just as science fiction has a place more and more in serious fiction. I don't really believe Turner's intention is to capitalize on the *Star Wars* hokum that James Merrill refers to in a cover blurb, nor is it to write a kitsch epic, taking the risk others like Turner Cassity and Peter Klappert have of turning kitsch into culture rather than reducing culture to kitsch. Too much in Turner's poem is in earnest, too little is humorous, the entire enterprise is solemn. As one who watches recent developments in narrative poetry, I read Turner's poem with chagrin, asking myself if this is, in fact, what one thinks of when one considers a contemporary epic? Must the dim past return as science fiction? Must the narrative poem of epic length be resurrected as pulp? It could very well be that a poem like Turner's, in which action and character are of heroic dimensions, is where it all has to start, again.

Daryl Hine solves the problem of form in his book-length narrative poem[10] mostly in traditional ways. First, his poem is divided into twelve sections, each named for a month and beginning, with the school year, in September. Then, since for Hine poetry is metrical composition, he has chosen to write what he calls an Alexandrine line of twelve syllables; this choice is a smart one allowing for

[9] THE NEW WORLD, by *Frederick Turner*. Princeton University Press. $26.00; $9.95.

[10] ACADEMIC FESTIVAL OVERTURES, A POEM, by *Daryl Hine*. Atheneum. $20.00; $10.95.

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a wider variety of beats per line, less predictability than page after page of blank verse, yet it risks doggerel. And the poem rhymes the even-numbered lines of each verse paragraph in a pattern of xaxaxbxb and so on. Since Hine is a poet of insistent wit, few opportunities to pun are passed up, at least when he is more or less marking time or developing a character or setting. A lesson at his junior high in British Columbia called "Taking care of our tools" is described as raising "a tumescent titter / in pubescent circles," for example.

But a narrative poem is supposed to deliver something more than the satisfaction of certain lyrical criteria; it has to tell a story. Hine tells a good one, one that grows more harrowing and solemn and sad as the book comes to an end. It is the story of a precocious junior high school boy, Hine himself, adopted son of a dour Scot, who as part of his sexual awakening falls in love with one of the class stars, a handsome young athlete. The path to their consummation as friends is a winding one. Much of the poem deals with the narrator's anguish and precocity and provisional friendships between the ages of thirteen and fourteen, during a single school year and into the summer. His father, his mother, and two librarians, a woman and a man, all figure importantly, all are touching, even in their perversity. It is Hine himself, represented straightforwardly with more than confessional fullness, who tends to grow annoying. This is a kid who is already reading Northrop Frye in junior high school; who, in fact, reads everything and begins his career as a poet. As I read, I kept wishing he would lighten up. But he never does, and by the end of the poem it seems clear why he doesn't. He has learned that "There is no hierarchy to unhappiness" once the boy he loves becomes seriously hurt. He learns, too, that his own profound loneliness can only be shared by another who is, in a sense, handicapped by solitude. When Hine tries to console the crippled Donald Wisdom, the boy responds like any pre-teen.

> What, compared to the loss of function and sensation,
> Was the fact that he was alive and not in pain?
> I spoke airily of intellectual pleasures,
> But he muttered, "That's O. K. for you, you're a brain."

Hine's poetry suffices to give this story its haunting sadness, bad puns, and good, and all.

Currently, narrative exists best or most successfully in the lyric mode. At least, so-called narrative poets like Dave Smith are in greater abundance than Turners, Hines, or Keithleys. Dave Smith has also published his selected poems,[11] a more modest volume than Ashbery's, but I think it is also premature. Dave Smith's poetic language is perfervid, hallucinatory, and redundant, and presses the

[11] THE ROUNDHOUSE VOICES, SELECTED AND NEW POEMS, by *Dave Smith*. Harper & Row. $16.95; $7.95.

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reader with its rhetoric but without any apparent purpose. Dave Smith is a visionary without a vision, and he may be a narrative poet without stories. Yet the last poem in this book, while it displays all of Smith's weaknesses, including the greatest one—bathos (he actually writes of a "coffee urn with its strong blessing")—also shows a direction he has found and, it could be, begun successfully to follow. If it was too early for Smith to issue a selected poems, it is also too early to close the book on the kind of poet he may become.

Smith has shown an affinity for narrative poets like Robert Penn Warren and, even, Louis Simpson. But Smith himself is not a narrative poet. His song is himself. On occasion he can be moving, if you are rooting for him, and that is the response, as if reading the work of a talented beginner, that slowly grows during the reading of his selected poems. But as for narrative structure, and the art of its many conventions, John Ashbery has a surer sense of narrative poetry than Smith.

Smith's poetry displays the growing discursiveness of the lyric poem, with a Southern twist à la Robert Penn Warren. Actually, as a lyric poet, he is best brief. "Pine Cones," "The Spring Poem," "Guinea Hens" succeed in a way the big set pieces do not. The notable exception is the book's finest single poem, "The Colors of Our Age: Pink and Black." In it, we do get a loose narrative structure, based on the perusal of old photographs (the photograph has taken the place of the painting as *the* aesthetic object for poetry). Growing up in the South, seeing the civil rights conflicts, being part of them or tangent to them, and looking back—the poem really is about memory—all are set out in the characters of the poet and his girlfriend and their world in the 1950s. The emotional power of the poem derives from these things but most emphatically from the story of the girl, from what Dave Smith thinks has happened to her. The poem's final moment, the product of the power of narrative, is like no other in this poet's work.

What the last poem, "Kitchen Windows," gives us is a poet of clarity and human warmth. It lacks event, but it unifies time and place, creates a setting and populates a house with people at a holiday party. The only real character, though, is Dave, who steps outside in the dark for a moment and thinks of Chaucer. It is an affecting moment, nevertheless, one that may be a foreshadowing. Will Dave Smith go the Chaucer route and give us the other pilgrims on the way? This book, after its opening poem, begins in obscurity and slowly makes its way to clarity; that is its development. Long, linked sentences are laid down over lines, and this is a strength of the poetry, for against fragmentation it posits wholeness, linkage against disruption, and sound against silence. I am all for those things. But if Dave Smith is going to live up to his promise, he has to make more than sound and sense.

Andrew Hudgins' first book[12] shows that he may be the foremost

[12] SAINTS AND STRANGERS, by *Andrew Hudgins*. Houghton Mifflin Co. $13.95; $6.95.

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practitioner of the narrative lyric at this time. The book's epigraph from St. Augustine, "To blame the fault of a creature is to praise its essential nature," is right on target for many of these poems in which people who find themselves in extremity, including the author, are shown with all their flaws and still given their due. A warmth of this sort, a real vulgarity in the sense of the vernacular and the people who use it, has not been present in our poetry since James Wright's death, although Philip Levine has also shown it. And it is the story element of the poem, its narrative component, that shows it best.

Much of Hudgins' milieu is Southern, so when he brings anecdotes together in a lyric whole, as in "Prayer," he often begins with experiences of childhood in the South, where a woman in church might holler, "Hep me, Jesus!" Usually from that beginning point he travels, often ending himself among strangers, even when they are loved ones. There are thirty-three poems divided into four sections in the book; the fourth section is comprised of the eight-part title poem. In it, a daughter of a retired itinerant preacher recalls her life with him now that he has been debilitated by a stroke and is unable to care for himself. This poem is the most completely narrative in structure. Unlike many contemporary persona poems, its first person narration has more the thrust of a fictional convention. In poetry, this can bring up the problem of genre, of the precedent of dramatic monologue, but not here. Hudgins can create moments so pathetic all you can do in response is laugh. Marie, the narrator of "Saints and Strangers" (her daddy's name for Christians "in the world"), explains her father's failing mind and health:

> He's scared to leave the house. Incontinence.
> When he's wet himself, he lets us know
> by standing grimly at our bedroom door
> and reading from his Bible.

On one occasion Daddy has run through the local Kroger's "pointing out demons." These late-life humiliations are complicated for Marie by her love for him, of course, and his tenderness for her the years he was bringing her up, despite the obsession of his calling.

Two other poems stand out for comment, in part because they leave the Southern milieu and yet bring that storytelling loquacity we tend to associate with it (Hudgins keeps his in check with an idiosyncratic iambic meter that gives his poems an original rhythm). One is "Sotto Voce," the only poem I know in which an overheard conversation is not presented to us condescendingly but with lyric sweetness and humor. The other, the book's masterpiece, is "Returning Home to Babylon" in which the poet writes of "The Eunuch who loves Daniel—Ashpenaz" and is able to get completely inside the Biblical story and bring along extraordinary details of his own life, understanding greatness and weakness of character in a way few poets have of late. Andrew Hudgins' narrative lyric poems are the state of the art.

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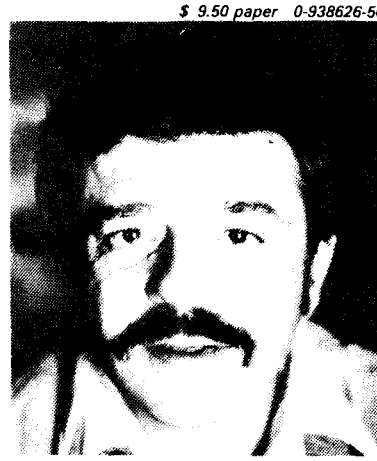

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# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

WILLIAM HALLBERG,* an assistant professor of English at East Carolina University, is married and has two little children, and is the author of a novel, *The Rub of the Green*, which is now making the rounds at various publishing houses. His stories have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Carleton Miscellany* (which ran a piece of his and, he says, "immediately died, as if it had swallowed a black pellet"), and others. His life goal is to be paired with Jack Nicklaus in the Crosby Pro-Am at Pebble Beach. . . . GEORGE WATSON, who is a Fellow in English at St. John's College, Cambridge, England, has been a professor at New York University and Helen Lanier professor of English at the University of Georgia in Athens. He is the author of *Politics & Literature in Modern Britain* and *The Idea of Liberalism*, and general editor of the *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* and of *Shorter New CBEL*. . . . PAUL PICKREL,* professor of English at Smith College, was for nearly two decades the managing editor of *The Yale Review* and for a somewhat shorter time chief book reviewer for *Harper's Magazine*. Recent essays have appeared in *ELH*, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, and *College English*, and other essays are forthcoming in *Studies in English Literature* and *American Literature*. . . . EMILY GROSHOLZ has been working on Leibniz, Newton, and Descartes this year at the National Humanities Center. She resumes teaching at Pennsylvania State University in late August. She is at work on a second book of poems and a long essay on feminism and poetry for a volume of essays about contemporary American poetry projected by Robert McDowell.

Last November MARK PERLBERG gave a reading of his poems at the Library of Congress. . . . DOROTHY ROBERTS was first published in *The Hudson Review* in 1959. Many of her poems have appeared in Canadian anthologies, textbooks, and recordings. . . . JEROME MAZZARO's *The Caves of Love* (Jazz Press, 1985) and *Rubbings* (Quiet Hills Press, 1985) have appeared recently. He is the editor of *The Poetry Review* and a recurrent contributor to *The Hudson Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, and *Salmagundi*. He lives in Buffalo and teaches at the State University there. . . . ERIKA MUMFORD's* poems in this issue of *The Hudson Review* grew out of two years of living and travelling in India and are part of a book-length manuscript that she has recently completed. Her first book, *The Door in the Forest*, was published by Green River Press in 1980. One of her recent poems, written while she was a Fellow at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, was co-winner of the *Poet Lore* Narrative Poet-

*Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

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ry Contest this year. She received a Massachusetts Artists Foundation Fellowship for 1986 and hopes to spend some time again this year, as she puts it, "away from the real world at a writers' colony—where poets are coddled and spoiled and taken seriously." . . . WILLIAM VIRGIL DAVIS has published two books of poetry—*One Way to Reconstruct the Scene* (1980) which won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award, and *The Dark Hours* (1984) which won the Calliope Press Chapbook Prize. He has held two Fulbrights and taught at the University of Vienna (Austria) and the University of Copenhagen (Denmark) in 1979–80 and 1984 respectively. He and his family lived in Wales in 1983. He is professor of English and Writer-in-Residence at Baylor University, and has published a good deal of criticism and short fiction.

JAMES FINN COTTER is spending the summer at Cornell University on a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to write about the Book Within the Book in medieval literature and manuscript illumination. . . . ROBERT SCHULTZ has taught at both Cornell University and the University of Virginia, and now teaches at Luther College (his alma mater) in Decorah, Iowa. His poems in this issue are from a nearly completed manuscript, *The Spectrum of Fire,* for which he will soon be seeking a publisher. A letterpress chapbook, *Vein Along the Fault,* was published in 1979 by The Laueroc Press (Brooktondale, N.Y.), and sixteen poems were included in an anthology, *Thirtieth Year to Heaven,* by The Jackpine Press in 1980. . . . EMILY HIESTAND is a visual artist and a poet, and a candidate for the Master's Degree in Poetry at Boston University. In 1985 she was awarded a grant for poetry from the Artists Foundation. Her essays on modern culture appear in the *Boston Globe Magazine*, and her first book of poems, called *Green*, is just completed. Current visual works include: paintings based on the Amazon rain forest, and a poetry video. . . . A transplanted New Yorker who teaches in the Literature Department of the University of California at San Diego, PATRICIA TERRY* lives in the hills east of San Diego with her neuroscientist husband, Scottish Deerhound, and Abyssinian cat. She says that the palms in "Tropical Architecture," however, are not Californian but Caribbean. Her book-length publications include translations from Old French *(The Song of Roland, Renard the Fox),* Old Norse *(Poems of the Vikings),* modern French poets (Laforgue, Reverdy). She has recently completed a book of poems called *The Transparent Hawk.*

RICHARD HORNBY* is a professor of theatre at Florida State University. His books include *Script into Performance, Patterns in Ibsen's Middle Plays,* and, most recently, *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception,* which has just been published by Bucknell University Press. He travels regularly to New York and London to see and review plays. He is currently at work on a book on the aesthetics of acting, which he calls the least understood of the arts. . . . DEAN FLOWER's first

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publication in *The Hudson Review* was exactly a decade ago, in the Summer issue of 1976, and he has been an Advisory Editor with the magazine since November 1982. He is presently engaged in writing about the novels and stories of the Anglo-Indian writer, Anita Desai. . . . JEFFERSON HUNTER has recently completed a book on photography and literature, and is now turning to work on Joyce (a guidebook to *Ulysses*) and Rebecca West. . . . MARK JARMAN is the author of three books of poetry, *North Sea* (1978), *The Rote Walker* (1981), and *Far and Away* (1985). He teaches at Vanderbilt University. With Robert McDowell, he is co-editor of *The Reaper,* a literary journal, and co-publisher of Story Line Press, a new press for the publication of books of poetry which is a collaborative effort of The Reaper, Inc. and The Nicholas Roerich Museum. Currently, Jarman is completing his fourth book of poetry and writing an essay on religion and contemporary American poetry. He is also collaborating with the poet Wyatt Prunty on a new textbook/anthology of American poetry. With his wife Amy and their daughters Claire and Zoë he is looking for a house to buy in Nashville, Tennessee. . . . THE RT. REV. PAUL MOORE, JR.* is Bishop of New York (Episcopal).

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